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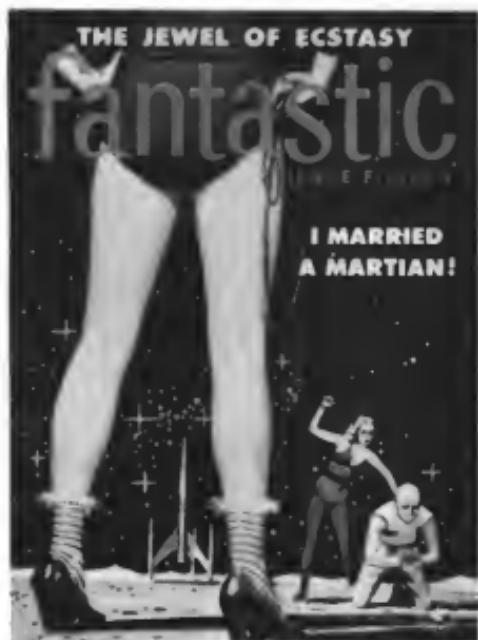
THE
SPACE
BREED



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the Observatory

BY THE EDITOR

- We have been informed that copies of this issue of *Amazing Stories* will be sent to the Kremlin by Russian representatives in the United States, and that we will be labeled as warmongers in Russian propaganda dispatches. The proof cited will be the novel published herein—"One Of Our Cities Is Missing." It will be claimed that the novel is printed for the sole purpose of agitating for armed conflict.

This of course is not true. Quite the opposite. First off, the novel qualifies as a gripping narrative. It is the story of an invasion of the United States and it carries an emotional impact that is rarely found in fiction.

This justifies its publication with respect to editorial requirements. But even so, if we felt it would in any way aggravate an already dangerous situation it would not see print in this magazine.

But we sincerely feel the reverse is true. Let us remember that, while the possibility of atomic war is ever in our minds, the hideous experience itself is still beyond our experience and therefore somewhat beyond our conception. So, we feel that anything done to clarify that concept without living through—or dying in—the experience itself, is a worthy effort.

"One Of Our Cities Is Missing" tends in that direction because we're sure that, as you follow the narrative, one certainty will loom ever clearer in your mind: If atomic war does come *this is how it will be*. And your conclusion will follow automatically: *It must not come to pass*. It must stay only in the realm of fiction. The reality is too horrible to contemplate.

And we fervently hope the Russians reach the same conclusion.—PWF

AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

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APRIL 1958
Volume 32 Number 4

NOVEL

ONE OF OUR CITIES IS MISSING

By Irving Cox..... 73

SHORT STORIES

THE SPACE BREED

By Adam Chase..... 6

THE LAST CITIZEN

By Bertram Chandler..... 17

THE STARS FOUGHT BACK

By John Hagan..... 26

VENUSIAN, GET OUT!

By Rog Phillips..... 44

FEATURES

RESEARCH INTO DEATH

By Dr. Arthur Barron..... 59

...OR SO YOU SAY

By The Readers..... 5



Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY

Cover illustration suggested by scene from
THE SPACE BREED

Editor
PAUL W. FAIRMAN

Managing Editor
CELE GOLDSMITH





...OR SO YOU SAY

BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

I have just finished the February issue of *Amazing*. I liked it. There were three really top quality stories and the remainder were fair reading.

I have a comment to make on a recent suggestion that you publish a "combozine." I hope you are not really considering this. It would not be practical. Your "novels" are doing a better job than a "combozine" would do.

Sorry The Space Club is changing magazines. *Amazing* won't be the same. Oh, well, I read *Fantastic*, too, luckily.

How about putting some of those pretty females from the stories in *Amazing* on your covers? Or at least on the inside cover? Why doesn't somebody publish a "Space Pin-Ups" picture magazine with female and male science fiction story characters? Then the female readers will like it as much as the male readers.

How about a story by Ray Palmer in *Amazing*?

Marvin Pfeifer

R. R. 1

Paw Paw, Illinois

• *Story by Ray Palmer coming up.*

Dear Ed:

I have read many of your magazines and I am of the opinion that yours is one of the best collections of s-f stories I have ever read.

Your October issue, I think was extremely good, in that it put before myself and others the stories of UFO not only in fiction but in fact as well. I think this is one subject that should be brought to the attention of all people.

(Continued on page 69)

THE SPACE BREED

By ADAM CHASE

ILLUSTRATOR SCHROEDER

On the basis of our suddenly accelerated rate of scientific progress, your children's children may well live on another planet. An actual concept of such a life is difficult to get. For instance, can you conceive living in a world where the life or death of your child hinged on the capacity of a portable oxygen tank? The strength of a plastic helmet? A world where distance is not measured in miles but in buckets of liquid air? This is a story of such a world and of tomorrow's children.

WHEN the big day arrived, Wisconsin Phillips and his sister Pauline had disappeared.

Wis was ten years old, and since this was the tenth anniversary of the Sirius Four colony Wis had a certain amount of fame as the first child born eight light years from Earth. He liked to say he was conceived in space, not that he knew precisely or even approximately what that meant, but he had heard some of the grownups at the colony say that, and the mysterious term appealed to his imagination.

Pauline, two years younger than Wis, was one of the four hundred babies born so far under the big dome of Sirius IV. Their dog Orion, who disappeared with them, was four years old—which made Orion, an improbable mixture of beagle and doberman, the

only mature member of the trio.

The reason no one could find them on the big day was because they had gone outside the dome.

Pauline had been frightened, but Wis taunted her until she went along with him. They had been outside before, but only in the company of grownups. They had their own pint-sized spacesuits and, of course, even the domestic animals of the Sirius IV colony had spacesuits. For one thing, the liquid air aqueduct was still being built, which meant that going outside for buckets of air was still a necessary occupation of the colonists; and a kid, like anyone else, could tote a bucket.

But on the big day, Wis, Pauline and Orion didn't go outside to the Air River. They just went outside because Wis wanted to.



With adventure ahead, the danger was forgotten.

And on the big day, all going outside meant was that you crossed an imaginary line, for that was the day the plastite dome was lifted.

It had to be lifted because the big day on Sirius Four was the day the first new ship came from distant Earth. Wis hadn't really expected to go wandering off. His father, John Philips, was chairman of the Greeting Committee; his mother Patricia was in charge of baking. The big day was the day seventy-five new colonists from far earth arrived at Sirius Four.

Wis hadn't known what to expect. The spaceship, though, was a disappointment—just an enormous, almost featureless projectile. And the new colonists, as they filed off and trooped, wearing spacesuits, into the farm-city, were a disappointment. Why, Wis thought, they looked like anybody. Just like anybody.

While all along his father had been briefing him proudly on the meaning of the new arrivals from Earth. "It means we're here to stay, son," he had said the night before. Of course they were there to stay, Wis thought in mild exasperation. Could they be anything else? There wasn't a single spaceship in the entire colony, except the original one which had been dismantled to build the farm city.

"It means Sirius Four is a success," John Philips had also told his ten-year-old son. "It means that though we're now restricted to this little area a

few square miles in extent, some day we'll carve a home for humanity on the entire planet." Then he said, pointing through the transparent dome which, the night before the big day, was still up: "Out there, son, there's a whole new world waiting to be explored, waiting to be tamed, waiting to be conquered by man. Someday we're going to do it. Someday, maybe your children's children will do it."

It was the thought of the new world adventure that really excited Wis. It sounded like a fine idea, this exploration: Wis didn't see why he couldn't do it now.

It was then that Patricia Philips, her hands white with flaky dough, came into the room and made a mistake. The mistake was in saying: "John, he doesn't understand what you're trying to say. He's too young."

Wis didn't think he was too young. With the other children born after him Wis had seen the pictures of the early days of the colony, the dismantling of the ship, the setting up of the farm-city—which really was a gigantic hydroponics laboratory with living quarters—the erection of the plastite dome. There didn't seem to be a thing they did in the pictures that Wis himself could not do.

So on the big day, when the dome was shut off and all the grownups were busy with preparations for the new arrivals, Wis put on his spacesuit, Pauline reluctantly put on hers, they both

dressed Orion, and outside they went.

Pauline had good reason to be reluctant. In the first place, all the children at the colony had the dangers of airlessness and two hundred degrees below zero temperature drummed into them. "You couldn't survive out there a minute without protection," they were told. "There's no air to breathe, and no one can live unless he breathes. Also, the terrible cold will freeze you to ice in seconds. Why, even the oxygen of this planet is frozen."

That was one thing. The other was the Taggles.

Although the Taggles were a bogey-man sort of danger to the children of the colony, they were another reason Wis decided to go outside and do some exploring on his own. For Taggles wasn't really their name, their name was all but unpronounceable, and Wis, the oldest child in the colony, had tried to approximate the sound of it at age four with the word Taggle. The name had stuck. No one, not even adults, called the original inhabitants of Sirius Four anything but Taggles now. Didn't that give Wis a certain proprietary right to exploration?

"The Taggles," John Philips had told his children, "are a mystery. We don't know much about them, you understand, except that they've been mighty good to us. Our home planet Earth, you see, was overcrowded. So, when we started out for Sirius Four,

a thousand other expeditions started out for a thousand other unexplored places. Many of them had to go back because the native populations were hostile, a few of them were even wiped out. Why, on Fomalhaut Seven—"

"Dear—" a gentle nudge from the wife in question—"tell him about the Taggles."

"Well, yes. Sure. The Taggles lived here before we did, son. They lived here about a million years before we did. It's their planet, and they're good enough to let us share it."

"Are they afraid of us, Pop?"

"Afraid? No, of course not. There are so few of us, it would not be any trouble for them to wipe us out, like what happened on Fomalhaut Seven. That's why we have to be nice to them. In a way, though, we're lucky. Because the Taggles aren't matter-converters."

"Huh?"

"Well, that is, they don't eat food. They eat energy. So, theoretically, we could cultivate every acre of their planet—and it is their planet, make no mistake about that—and they would not mind. They're a funny lot, though. We've been here ten years and we hardly know a thing about them. They keep to themselves and—"

"Dear, you're forgetting the whole point—"

"Oh, yeah. Sorry. They're big and strong and they can work magic, especially on little children. That's why it isn't safe to

go outside alone, except maybe for a bucket of air if you're told to. Because of the Taggles."

All these circumstances conspired to send ten-year-old Wis Philips outside on the first real opportunity. Not that he intended to go *far*. Gee whiz, he knew better. It had been drummed into his head that the air supply in a spacesuit was good for only ten hours. Just a little walk, that's all, especially since he had a baby like Pauline with him, who was so scared she almost puckered and broke into tears when they crested the first rise and dropped into the first little valley, thus cutting off all view of the farm-city. . . .

"John, have you seen Wis?"

"No. Isn't he with you and Pauline?"

"No." Alarmed. "I thought Pauline was with Wis and you."

"Well, they'll turn up. Why don't we send Orion to fetch them. Here, Orion! Here, boy!"

"Orion?" Frightened now. "Where's Orion?"

Orion, actually, was the trouble. Maybe Wis wouldn't have gone very far, except for Orion. Certainly Pauline would have been delighted to return at once. She practically begged Wis, but he wouldn't hear of it at first.

And then, when even he began to get a little anxious because the convoluted terrain, frozen, bleak, had long-since hidden the farm-city from view, Orion ran off.

"Hey, Orion! Hey, come back here, boy! Hey, Orion, come on!"

But Orion yiped playfully and scampered off.

Sure-footedly over a thrusting ridge and down the other side out of sight. Barking and yelping with delight, as if he had waited all the interminable span of his dog-life just for this moment.

"Wis, I'm scared."

"Come on." Running. "We can't just *leave* him here."

"Wis, I wanna go back."

"Sissy!"

Wis ran after the dog. Pauline choked on tears and followed him. "Wait for me. Wait, Wis, pleeeze!" In her mind's eye, Pauline was thinking of Taggles. Not that she knew what they looked like.

They chased Orion for about an hour. It's problematical what Orion was chasing or thought he was chasing, for not counting farm-city, the only life-form on Sirius Four were the energy eating Taggles, and neither Wis, Pauline nor Orion had seen any Taggles yet.

That was to come later.

Finally, Orion spent his playful energy. Tail wagging ridiculously inside the spacesuit, he waited for them. Wis wanted to scold the dog, but tongue hanging inside his helmet, flanks heaving, eyes sparkling, Orion looked so pleased with himself that Wis relented.

"All right, boy," he said, feeling very grown up. "You've had your fun. Now let's go back."

This time Wis held the space-suit leash in a tight grip.

"I'm tired, Wis. All these mountains."

"Hills, silly. If you climbed a mountain," said Wis in a superior manner, "you'd know it."

"Two more hours, back the way they had come. At least Wis thought it was the way they had come. But two hours to cover the ground they had covered before in one hour.

And no farm-city in sight anywhere.

Just the convoluted, lifeless ground, of Sirius Four. Just the black velvet of the airless sky with its incredible sprinkling of stars. Just the emptiness and the desolation all around them.

Pauline started to cry.

Wis looked at her, the tears streaming down her cheeks inside the helmet she wore. "I want to go back," she said. "I want to go *home*. I don't want to explore. Wis, take me back."

Wis wanted to say, "Ya big baby," but he didn't. He was getting a little scared himself. Straight ahead of them looked like right in back of them. The saw-toothed hills on their left looked just like the saw-toothed hills on their right. There wasn't any farm-city in sight anywhere. Of course, if the dome was up they could see it a long way off. But the dome was shut off and all the colonizers and all their animals wore spacesuits. It was the only way to let the new colonists and their equipment in,

since the dome's airlock admitted only a couple of people at a time.

Everywhere you looked, it was the same. Rock. Sharp-edged hills. Precipitous gullies.

Wis knew suddenly they were lost.

"I want to go *home*!" Pauline repeated, snuffling her tears. "You take me right home, Wis Philips."

So, holding Pauline's hand through her space-glove, with Orion now trailing obediently behind on his leash, Wis started walking.

The sensible thing to do would have been to wait in one spot until the dome went back up, because as yet they couldn't be too far away, even if they had gone outward in one direction all three hours they'd been runaways, which was certainly unlikely.

But Wis didn't do the sensible thing. Pauline was scared and crying. And Wis didn't want to admit he was almost as scared as she was. He couldn't do that, could he? He was ten years old.

He walked. Pauline, sniffing, walked with him. Orion seemed very happy.

They walked about an hour.

After an hour was when Wis realized they came back to where they started from. There was a hill that looked like three teeth biting into the black sky, Wis remembered. And there it was again.

"I think we're lost," Wis said.

He shouldn't have said it, but it just came out. Pauline began to bawl, really in earnest now.

So Wis said he was joking. His kid-sister hated him right then and freely admitted it. This made Wis ornery. He wouldn't give up. They kept walking.

Five hours after they started out, they found the city.

It didn't look like any city Wis had ever seen in pictures. It was a Taggle City, almost a million years old because the Taggles were an ancient race, but Wis didn't know that yet. It was a place, about a mile square, where the saw-toothed hills had been flattened out, where the ground had been polished utterly flat and smooth. It looked like a gigantic billiard table. Which meant, as Wis was soon to learn, that the city was underground.

Right in the middle of it, just as Wis, Pauline and Orion reached the spot, the smooth rock parted and rolled back and a trap-door opened.

Pauline screamed: "Taggle!"
And she was right.

There were two Taggles there suddenly, and they were almost as scared as Pauline, probably more scared than Wis. They didn't look like much, really, Wis thought, even though he knew they were Taggles. How could they look like much? They were energy-eaters. They were quite insubstantial. If the ectoplasm superstitious people claim ghosts are made of is sort of fuzzy, sort of half-transparent, sort of weightless-looking and kind of glowing, then the Taggles looked like ghosts.

"It's Men!" the first one cried in silent telepathic excitement. "You want to go back and get help?"

"They seem harmless enough," the second Taggle said a little doubtfully. This second Taggle was more optimistic because ten Earth years ago he had been on the Council which allowed the Outworlders, Men, they were called, to colonize Sirius Four. There was just no reason for matter-eaters and energy-eaters to be in conflict. They could inhabit the same planet in perfect harmony. He repeated: "They seem harmless enough. They aren't armed."

"What's the one with four walking limbs?" the first Taggle wanted to know. He was uneasy.

"I don't know. I guess it's a child and the other two are adults. Why don't you ask them?"

"Who, me? Why don't *you*?"

The Taggles were a very shy people. Once granting colonization rights to the Men who had come from space, they had scrupulously ignored their guests on Sirius Four. They were a very ancient race and had had a considerable civilization at a time that saw Men still swinging through trees on Earth. They were a naturally inquisitive people and had, in fact, achieved scientific wonders. But being insubstantial energy-eaters, these wonders just weren't necessary and the Taggles had never exploited them.

"Hello!" the second Taggle,

unwilling to admit his own uneasiness, thought, projecting telepathically. "Are you the leaders of the colony?" Naturally, they would be the leaders. Only the leaders would come out personally to make contact with the Taggles.

Wis warmed to the occasion as he heard the words in his mind. And he wanted desperately to prove to Pauline she had nothing to cry about. So, while he didn't wish to lie and hence didn't answer their question directly, he did say, grandiloquently: "I am the only one ever conceived in space!"

Being insubstantial energy-eaters, the Taggles didn't have any idea, any more than did Wis, of what "conceived in space" meant. But it impressed them. Hadn't Men come through space to Sirius Four?

"Be the guest of our city," offered the second Taggle, giving the first one a look of triumph because the Men were so friendly and so obviously not hostile. Even the first Taggle felt better.

What they did not know, was that Wis, Pauline and Orion now had only five or six hours air supply left. After that they would die of asphyxiation. And Wis, in his excitement, forgot all about it.

They were taken on a tour of Taggle City, which had about a thousand inhabitants. They were told — and shown — wonders. They understood almost nothing, but Wis was enjoying himself

immensely, and occasionally a glimmering of what he saw and was told got through to him.

"This is our energizer. It draws energy directly from Sirius. We feed on it since we're energy-eaters. Of course, you have different problems. But Sirius-power — sun-power — is still a very great achievement, even for you. It could grow your crops, work your dome, build your cities, power your spaceships . . ."

An hour passed. Four hours of air—and life—left.

"These murals show you what we once were like, five million years ago. You are surprised? But you see, we too once were matter-eaters. Then our planet died. We had an option. Like you, we could go out into space. Or, we could convert ourselves to energy-eaters and stay here. We selected the latter course. You see, once we were not too unlike yourselves."

Wis and Pauline gazed in fascination at the tri-de murals. Another hour passed. Three hours left of air—and life.

"We could have told you all this before," said their Taggle guide. "But we're a shy people, and you seemed so busy in your dome, we didn't want to bother you. We don't, you see, wish to intrude. But—and I hope you won't think this is presumptuous —in our long history we've made some discoveries which could probably help you. For example . . ." The Taggle went on telepathically about something

called hyper-space which Wis didn't understand at all. ". . . for us, you see, it was merely a theoretical discovery. We are not wanderers, as you Men are. We have no wish to leave our native planet. But still, with the hyper-drive, it would be possible for a ship to go from here to Earth in days instead of years. Quite a savings in . . ."

That didn't interest Wis. A long space voyage sounded like fun, so why shorten it?

Two hours left of air—and life.

"Also," went on the Taggle, leading them before a tremendous machine which dwarfed the considerable cavern that housed it, "this device was developed—five million years ago—as a third alternative. We could leave our home planet, we could convert to energy-status, or we could make our world inhabitable by matter-eaters again. You see, this device taps the radioactive core of the world, bringing heat from below instead of above. Sufficient heat would melt the seas of oxygen, give this world an atmosphere, and make completely feasible once more habitation by matter-eaters, such as we once were or such as you now are. But we're a passive people, which is why we never contacted you after you came and we agreed that you could stay. Which is why, instead of heating the planet and bringing air back, we decided to become energy-eaters . . ."

One hour left of air—and life.

Then Wis suddenly blurted.

"Air? Did you say air?" He began to get very excited. "My gosh, I almost forgot. We've got to get back. We've got to. I have to explain, I didn't want to admit it before, but we aren't grown-ups. We're just a couple of kids and a dog and—"

"Dog? What is dog?"

So Wis had to explain it. Then he said: "We're not leaders or anything. We're just kids. We're lost. We don't know how to get back. But if we don't get back soon, we're gonna die because we won't have any air to breathe."

"That," Pauline wailed, "is what daddy said! I knew it, I knew you'd get us in trouble, Wis Philips. I hate you!"

The Taggles didn't know what to make of this. They were energy-eaters, they were almost immortal, for five million years they had had no children. They debated it for a while. And kept on debating it, not knowing if this was some kind of joke the two Men were playing. . . . After all, interstellar humor could be wide of the accepted mark, and . . .

Half an hour left of air—and life.

"Children. Perhaps . . ."

"Yes, of course. Remember, in the ancient legends . . ."

"Immature beings, not fully—but not fully what?"

"Explain, please," one of them asked Wis.

He tried to explain. He could not make himself understood,

though. And by the time he finished he was barely coherent. He knew they were in trouble. Bad trouble. If they didn't get back in a few minutes . . .

Fifteen minutes left of air—and life.

"I'm hungry," Pauline said. "I'm thirsty. I wanna go *home*."

The Taggles had to dredge racial history for the meanings of hungry and thirsty.

"We need air," Wis insisted. "We're not like you. We'll die without air."

"Very well," said the Taggle who'd been their guide, "then we'll present our machine to your people. It means nothing to us if the planet is warmed, if oxygen vaporizes again after five million years."

"No, I mean now!"

Already Wis could hear the final faint hiss which meant his emergency tank was empty. He began to feel dizzy. Pauline looked very pale. Orion had stopped nipping around their space-boots and sat forlornly on his haunches.

The Taggles knew about air only theoretically, after five million years. But one of them brightened. "Ah, you mean you wish to try out the machine?"

"No, no, no!" Wis shouted. "I mean we need oxygen, right now." His vision began to swim. With an effort of will he kept himself from crying.

Then he broke down. He admitted it. He was just a kid. He didn't know what to do. He

couldn't do anything. If they didn't get help, and fast, he and his sister and the dog were going to die.

That way, as a child admitting he was a child, Wis got through to them. One of the Taggles rushed outside for some liquid air. It was sloshed into their oxygen tanks—and only just in time. The heat of their space-suits immediately vaporized it, and Wis felt the giddy rush of air, too heavily laden with oxygen, but life-giving nonetheless.

He did a little jig. He felt great. He didn't know it, but he had an oxygen jag.

"Children," telepathized one of the Taggles. "But I don't understand. Their adults—parents?—remained aloof of us. But the children came."

"Yes," said another. "But we remained aloof of them, and our culture is far older than Man's. Perhaps it takes a child, with the guileless mentality of a child, with the sense of wonder and imagination of a child. . . . In a sense, weren't their parents who came here ten years ago, more like children, with their dreams and hope and . . . I don't know . . ." Here the telepathy grew hazy for Wis, and he lost most of its meaning; but he did understand this much: "What I mean is, we were too old. We settled back passively, accepting defeat at the hands of our environment because it was the easiest way out. But Men didn't. They were—racially—children."

They had a sense of wonder. They came here. We were too old, but they weren't. With their immaturity but their imagination, they came here, don't you understand? They were something we couldn't be. They were young enough: they were the space breed. . . ."

There was more which Wis couldn't follow. Then: "Working together, with our achievements and their unconquerable drive, what might we not accomplish? And it took these children to make us realize . . . come, let's take them home."

And they all went up and outside.

The dome over farm-city was back in place. The new colonists had all been accounted for, but there was grief in the colony—for two children, fourteen hours missing, were assumed dead. It was the first such accident in the history of the colony and it seemed an unpropitious event with which to confront the new colonists.

It was worse than that for John Philips and his wife Patricia. It was tragedy.

But John Philips wouldn't give up hope.

That was why he was outside

the dome when the Taggles appeared.

Not just a few of them. Hundreds.

Descending on the colony.

With Wis, Pauline and Orion in their van.

After that there was much celebrating and the beginning of understanding between the Taggles, who were very old, and the Men, who were still very young. The Taggles could supply wonders, and the Men would know how to use them.

A cold planet turned warm, air again, the hyper-drive to bridge the vast interstellar gulf. . . .

Meanwhile, though, John Philips and the others would still go out for their buckets of air while Wis and children like him would play with their dogs and dream. This was what John Philips thought the day after the Taggles arrived and Wis and Pauline came back, as if miraculously, from the dead. As he entered the dome he saw Wis playing with Orion in a big discarded oxygen cylinder from the new ship. Wis and the dog were having a great time; the events of yesterday were forgotten.

And tomorrow beckoned, thanks to Wis. But he didn't understand that yet.

THE END

THE LAST CITIZEN

By BERTRAM CHANDLER

ILLUSTRATOR WALDMAN

Mr. Chandler, a British writer, always manages to add an extra "something" to his stories; an emotional scope that few authors achieve. He does this at times with a single phrase; a lone sentence. So we ask you—please don't read ahead of yourself in this story. Leave the last paragraph at the end.

SHE came screaming in from the black sky, her wide wings eclipsing the bright stars as she skimmed over the Polar wastes, lower, lower, until her long landing skids touched in a flurry of snow and powdered ice, touched, rebounded, and touched again. From her needle-sharp prow there was the brief, blinding flare of braking jets and she slowed abruptly to a halt. Lights came on inside her body, and the slowly settling ice crystals scintillated in the hard radiance from the ports like microscopic diamonds.

After a long while—there were tests to be made, measurements of atmospheric pressure and temperature to be taken—a door in her side opened. A dark figure, bulky in protective clothing, jumped down to the snow, followed by a second, similar figure,

and a third, and a fourth. The leader carried a long staff with a pointed ferrule, drove it, with a single, decisive action, deep into the snow. There was enough wind briefly to unfurl the flag at the head of the staff, to flaunt the gaily colored silk in the beam of the searchlight that had been directed upon it from the ship. The four men stood stiffly to attention, their right hands raised to their foreheads in salute. Then, one by one, they returned to their ship. Silently the door shut behind them. The only sound was the whispering and creaking of metal that, heated almost to incandescence by the flight through the atmosphere, was now cooling.

In the cabin, Dr. John Taylor carefully uncorked the whiskey bottle, poured carefully measured doses into each of the six glasses.

"Don't be so damned finicky, Doc!" Commander Peters shouted. "We've got here, and we're celebrating—we aren't taking medicine!"

Taylor grinned whitely at his captain—he, like the other five men was deeply tanned—and went on pouring. Then, as an afterthought, he added two millimeters to the contents of the glass that he handed to Peters.

The commander took it, handling it appreciatively.

"It's good," he said, "to be able to take a drink like a civilized human being at last. Eight months of sucking fluids out of plastic bulbs is eight months too long!"

He got to his feet. The smile slipped from his face, leaving it stern and hard and, thought the doctor, dedicated. He raised his glass.

"To the first men on Mars!" he said.

"The first men on Mars!" repeated the others.

Taylor, as did the others, gulped his whiskey.

Then—"Are we the first?" he asked quietly.

"Of course!" snapped Peters. "Who could possibly have got here before us?"

"The Russians?" suggested Wesley, the navigator, dubiously.

"If they had," said the commander, "we should have known about it . . ."

"Not necessarily," demurred Taylor. "They were almost always secretive—in their dealings with each other as well as with

the outside world. We know that they were pretty close to interplanetary flight twenty years ago—and that was when their top men in the field lost their lives when the atomic-powered rocket blew up on take-off. There must have been records destroyed at the same time . . ."

Not speaking, Peters held his glass out to Taylor. Silently, the little doctor refilled it.

"To the first men on Mars," he said again. "Us."

They slept poorly that night—the weight of their bodies, even in the slight Martian gravity, was irksome after the months of free fall. They were up and about before sunrise, unloading and assembling the equipment that they had brought with them. They had already reported their safe landing to the main fleet in its orbit around Mars, now, while the others put together the light, incredibly tough tractors, the radio operator tested the set that he would use to maintain communications during the trek to the Equator.

At noon they were ready to commence their journey southwards. The two tractors, thought Doctor Taylor as he stood well away from them, taking his photographs, looked like weird insects, looked, with the bulbous, pressurized tents dwarfing the chassis beneath, like the honey-pot ants he had once seen in Australia. And the ship herself, with the long skis of her landing gear, looked like some huge



He stared in fear and defiance—trying to comprehend.

grasshopper. He wondered briefly if there were any insects on Mars, if there was any life at all apart from the vegetation of the fertile areas.

"We shall soon find out," he whispered to himself, forgetting that his helmet set was switched on.

"What was that, Doc?" Peters' voice crackled in his earphones.

"I was wondering if there was any life here, Commander," he said, a little embarrassed.

"Of course, there is," laughed Peters. "We're it! Hurry up and take your pretty pictures, Doc. We're pushing off, now."

Taylor put the camera back into its case, walked with long strides back to the tractors. He took his place in the leading vehicle, sharing the long seat in the driver's cab with the commander and the navigator.

"As near as I can determine, Captain," Wesley was saying, "we made our landing almost exactly at the Pole. The Magnetic Pole can't be far away, so our compasses are practically useless. Too much vertical force, not enough horizontal"

"Steer for the sun," ordered Peters. "Keep the ship right astern. I'll keep an eye on your tracks to see that you're keeping a straight course."

"But the azimuth is changing all the time," protested Wesley.

"Steer for the sun," repeated Peters. "We'll have to put some mileage between us and the Magnetic Pole before our compasses will function. As soon as they

are some good, check the error—there's bound to be variation, and maybe some deviation as well"

"As you say, Commander," replied Wesley.

The note of the turbine rose an octave, the tractor lurched forward. Its motion, over the undulations of the ice cap, was not unlike that of a small craft in a seaway. The glare from the snow was painfully dazzling until Peters adjusted the polarization of the forward window of the cab.

Then they had no trouble.

So they pressed on, taking it in turns to drive. By sunset the compass was less sluggish and a halt was called while Wesley determined the compass error and meals were prepared in the pressurized tents. Two hours after through as much as over pulverized sand. Taylor had wanted an exploration, even only a brief one, of the edge of the ice cap, reasoning that life forms might exist there, but Peters was determined to make as good time as possible, to prepare the landing strip at the Equator for the other two rocket planes by the appointed date, if not before.

Through the night they drove on, the beams of their headlights more brilliant than the light of Phobos—they were still too far north for Deimos to show above their horizon. By watches they slept—or tried to sleep—in the pressurized tents, by watches they drove.

It was at dawn that they reached the bank of the canal.

Reluctantly, Peters agreed to a halt.

He was, thought Taylor, in many ways an ideal man for his job. He was not, now that the first thrill of landing had passed, a romantic to enthuse every minute of the day about the wonder and the glory of standing and walking on the surface of another world. He was not one to allow the requirements of scientific research to get in the way of his mission, which was to proceed with all possible dispatch to the Equator and there prepare the landing strip for the other rockets. The other ships would bring in the scientists. Peters was not a scientist, neither were his men. They were naval officers, technicians. Of them all, only Taylor and Wesley, the navigator, showed any desire to stand and stare. Of them all only Taylor, by virtue of his age and rank, could hope to argue with the commander.

"We've made good time," he said. "We can afford a halt. We can try to discover whether or not these canals are artificial waterways. We can look for ruins . . ."

The commander consulted with Wesley who, using his bubble sextant, had taken observations. He told Taylor that he would be allowed two hours for his exploration. He said that he, personally, would use that two hours for sleeping, and strongly advised

the others to do likewise. Wesley, however, decided to accompany the doctor.

The two men walked along the canal bank, stopping frequently to stoop to examine the scattered plants that grew there. Spherical they were, most of them, ranging in size from a marble to a basketball, with tough, green, leathery skins. Taylor felt vaguely disappointed. He should, he knew, have felt only awe at this evidence of the universality of life—but, as he put it to Wesley, it had been one helluva long way to come just to look at a lot of pumpkins . . .

"And as for the canals," he said, "as far as we can see they are no more than trickles running to the Equator from the Poles. They may look straight from Earth, or the Moon, or from a few million miles out in space—but they're far from being straight lines when you're standing beside 'em . . ."

"I was expecting a few ruined cities," said Wesley.

"So was I, frankly. Oh, I've no doubt there *will* be cities here—but only after we build 'em. Oh, well—I'll cut myself a pumpkin or two and find out if they're fit to eat when we get back to the tractors . . ."

South they ran, and south, keeping well to time. At set periods the brief messages crackled from the surface of Mars to the orbiting fleet, at set periods the laconic replies flashed back. Taylor, reading between the lines of

scientific colleagues' terse messages, sensed their disappointment. There were deserts a-plenty on Earth—and these deserts could and did maintain a far greater variety of life than did the Martian wastes, beings that crept and ran and jumped and flew. The sands of the Earthly deserts hid the ruins of past civilizations—but it seemed most unlikely that there had ever been a civilization on Mars. Evolution had produced the highly specialized plants, and then lost interest.

This, thought the doctor, was rather a pity, for the flesh of pumpkinlike things was fantastically rich in nutrient. It would be possible, he told the commander, for a man to live indefinitely off the country. It almost seemed, he went on, that Providence had prepared the Red Planet for colonization by man. Peters, spitting out an experimental mouthful of the overly tart flesh, spluttered, "Not by *this* man!"

South they ran, their metal tracks rattling over low stony hills, over plains of shingle that might once have been the vast beaches of some long-forgotten sea. South they ran, through a forest of tall, columnar plants, brittle, whose branches, shaken by the vibration of their passing, shattered with the crystalline clatter of breaking glass. It was here that both tents were badly torn; until the convoy was clear of the forest, when repairs were

made, the men had to live in their suits and helmets.

A day ahead of time they reached the Equator, and Peters steered east until he found what he decided was the best site for a landing strip. It was to the west of one of the canals, and the sand was fine, but not too fine, and there were no buried rocks. Even so, it was necessary to use the earth-levelling equipment that they had brought with them, the grader blades that could be fitted to the tractors.

Peter drove his men, and after two days' hard work the strip was ready. Messages were exchanged between the tractors and the ships then, when word was received that the rockets had already entered the atmosphere, the smoke bombs were set off, their long streamers of white vapor showing the direction of the wind.

The six members of the first landing party stood by their tractors, which had been withdrawn well clear of the landing strip, and scanned the clear sky for the first sight of the ships. They appeared suddenly—mere silvery specks at first, but expanding with almost frightening rapidity to vast, winged shapes. One after the other they swept down, vanishing momentarily, as their skis touched the surface, in clouds of upflung red sand. Then there was the handshaking and the shouted congratulations and, finally, the planning of the campaign for the further exploration of Mars.

Taylor didn't like Grant. He felt, as did all those who had made the first landing, a little superior to those who had come in to the prepared strip on the Equator. He felt that Mars was, by right of first occupancy, his planet—but Grant made it all too clear that he thought that Mars was his. Technically, Grant, who was the biologist of the expedition, was Taylor's superior—and this, too, he made all too clear.

He was excited when he called Taylor into his tent—but he contrived to hide his excitement beneath a mask of maddening superiority.

"You fellows," he said, "came all the way from the Pole to the Equator with your eyes shut."

"We did not," said Taylor.

"But you did, my dear Doctor, you did. You assured me that there was no evidence of the existence of animal life on Mars. As for intelligent life—that, you said, was entirely out of the question."

"There is no evidence," said Taylor dogmatically.

"Isn't there? It may interest you to know, Doctor Taylor, that I have found an artifact . . ."

"Where is it?" asked Taylor, suddenly excited.

"Come with me," said the biologist.

The two men put on their helmets, left the pressurized tent. Grant led the way to the canal, then along its bank to a sharp bend. Past this bend there was a patch of damp sand on which, for

some as yet inexplicable reason, none of the pumpkinlike plants was growing. Save in one spot the surface of the sand was smooth—and there somebody, something had been digging. He—or it—had done more than dig. In a neat row stood six little towers on the sand, six little towers of sand, six little truncated cones.

"Fantastic!" breathed Taylor. He looked around him, almost expecting to see deck chairs, a cockle stall, an ice-cream barrow.

He said, "But those aren't necessarily artifacts. There are plenty of worms on Earth that eat mud and sand, passing it through their bodies as all organic matter is extracted . . ."

"I thought of that," said Grant, "but the idea won't hold water. It's a Martian who's done this—an intelligent being letting us know that he's around . . ."

"An intelligent being," argued Taylor, "would have scratched Pythagoras' Theorem on the sand."

"Not necessarily. For all we know these six little sand castles, in a straight line, represent some glaringly obvious mathematical truth—to a Martian, that is . . ."

"Have you told the commodore yet?" asked Taylor.

"No," said Grant. "I'll tell him when I'm ready."

"In other words," said Taylor, "you'll tell him when you can lead a real, live Martian up to him by the hand and say, 'Please, sir, Commodore Jones, sir, look what I've found, sir!'"

"Cut out all the 'sirs,'" said Grant coldly, "and you've got it. I think it quite disgraceful that men of science should be under the orders of naval brass hats . . ."

"I'm a naval officer myself," Taylor reminded him.

"I'm sorry, *Surgeon Commander* Taylor. I forgot. But I'm still your boss, even though the commodore is mine. Anyhow, Doctor—you know these naval types. Don't you agree that if they do find out that there's a Martian in the vicinity there's liable to be all sorts of warlike activity that'll do more harm than good?"

"All right," said Taylor, after a long pause. "We keep it dark for the time being—just our own little secret. What then?"

"Tracks," said Grant. "You can see that something has walked over the sand. A biped, I'd say, with big feet like a camel's. Unluckily it went over that patch of bare rock, and beyond that there're the stony hills and that warren of canyons . . ."

Taylor stared at the little mounds, already crumbling as the dry air sucked the moisture from them.

"These couldn't have been made so long ago," he said. "What's your guess?"

"About an hour after the morning thaw," said Grant. "Say about 0930 Local Time. Now, here's what I propose doing. We get shovels from the camp, and a sheet of aluminum—they've already started dismantling the

wings of the ships, ready for blasting off. (Why the hurry, God knows!) We dig a trench, roof it over with the metal sheet, cover the aluminum with sand. We'll leave peepholes for ourselves, of course . . ."

"And when are we doing all this?"

"Now. But we'll come to the blind first thing tomorrow morning, before sunrise. You'll see that the sand is levelled off smoothly, and then leave me to keep a watch . . ."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," said Taylor. "I shall be in the blind with you. Oh, it's all right—I think I'll be able to get somebody to cover us up and keep his mouth shut. Wesley—he was our navigator on the run south. I'm sure he'll . . ."

The most awkward part of the construction of the blind was the "borrowing" of the aluminum sheets. This was accomplished when all members of the expedition were at their midday meal. Digging the trench took very little time; the excavated sand was thrown into the shallow water of the canal.

Taylor, rather to his surprise, slept soundly that night. He was able to awaken at any time without being called, and on this morning the gift stood him in good stead. He went first to the pressurized tent where Grant slept alone, shook the biologist into wakefulness. He then went to the tent that Wesley shared with three other junior officers,

all of whom, luckily, were sound sleepers.

The sun—small and weak it seemed—rose as the three men reached the blind. They brushed the sand from the aluminum sheets, lifted them, and then Taylor and Grant clambered into the trench. Wesley replaced the sheets. Faintly through their helmets they could hear the scraping sound as he respread the sand. He rapped sharply with his heel three times to indicate that he was going.

Neither Taylor nor Grant had his helmet radio switched on; they talked by bringing their helmets into contact with each other. They did not have much to say to each other. They stared through the observation holes, watching for the Martian to appear from the hills, to leave his message on the sand.

He came at last—a tall, shambling figure, humanoid.

Humanoid? thought Taylor. Humanoid?

Feet and body were wrapped in layer upon layer of shapeless rags—but on the shoulders there was the dull gleam of metal braid, of epaulettes. The face was dark brown where it was not covered by a thick, black beard. The black hair hung down to the being's waist.

It—he? — squatted on the smooth sand. Working with silent concentration it filled the little, bucket-shaped container it was carrying with the moist

grains, patted them tight, up-ended it . . .

"But it's . . ." Taylor began to whisper.

The Martian—even though the words were spoken inside the helmet of a spacesuit—heard the sound and took alarm. In a second he was gone, loping over the rocks, vanishing among the canyons of the hills.

Taylor and Grant came out from the blind.

Taylor picked up the little "pail" that the Martian had dropped. It must have been a food container. He pointed to the characters, faded but still visible, on the dented metal. "There'll be a wreck in the hills," he said. "A spaceship. It'll have a hammer and sickle painted on the bows, or the tail fins . . ."

"And it's not a Martian at all," Grant whispered. "Just a survivor, a crazy survivor . . ."

"No," said Taylor. "A Martian. Perhaps the Martian. That Russian ship had a mixed crew, you know. A child born here, brought up here, could, conceivably, manage to get along without a spacesuit, a helmet . . . (If only Lyssenko were alive to see this!) You've found your Martian . . ."

And what of the mother of a race? he wondered. What of the woman, who, clinging desperately to memories of a childhood spent on the shores of the Baltic or the Black Sea, had taught her son how to make castles in the sands of Mars?

THE END

The Stars Fought Back

By JOHN HAGAN

ILLUSTRATOR MARTINEZ

Will we eventually antagonize our space neighbors by flinging atom bombs and rockets around too enthusiastically? Who can say for sure? But if we do, we may be punished without even being aware of it. John Hagan, a newcomer to AMAZING STORIES tells us how this could come about. Let's hope the folks in outer space don't consult with John before retaliating for wrongs we do them.

MILITARY Headquarters are pretty much alike, except that they grow a bit more involved year by year. The big General at the head of a long table in a particular Headquarters had a satisfied look as he glanced around:

"Gentlemen, in fifteen minutes we start countdown on the first flight of our missile. I need not tell you the feeling of satisfaction within me at this moment. I know you are all as happy at this conclusion of our great project."

He took another look at the faces. A few were paying close attention, most of them men on his personal staff. Others had an indifferent attitude, chiefly the research men who had made most of this moment possible and cared little for a practical demonstration of a thing they knew must fly. Back in the days of

flying prototypes, experimental birds, these men had been interested, but not now. Last of all, a few men were frankly angry and conversed with no attempt to conceal dislike of the arrogant General heading the assemblage. He noted them, then continued, trying to draw the group into a unit:

"Countdown will start, as I said, in fifteen minutes. Zero will be at 1430 hours. Apogee, the height of arc, of our bird will be attained twenty minutes later. Add about fifteen minutes and you have the moment when our enemy will have felt the strength of our defense. Are there any comments?"

That did bring a reaction from one of the angry. A gray-haired man rose and spoke:

"One here. I take exception to the word 'defense'. May I ask if



The explosion was small but it doomed a world.

you seriously expect us to consider loosing a deadly missile on an unprepared city to be defense?"

The General was stung:

"That is very nearly treason, Doctor Newmeyer. May I remind you that certain of your more faint-hearted colleagues have already felt the displeasure of our government for voicing similar sentiments? This movement is purely defensive, strategically defensive, and we must all keep that in mind. If our enemy had perfected the system before we did, there is no doubt it would be launched promptly against us. We know we are several days ahead of them in preparation and advantage must be taken of the opportunity. After we have received the submission of their leaders, we can spread true democracy on this globe and assure ourselves freedom will not be challenged. With this dawn of a new day in mind, I suggest we all rise for a moment of prayer that our efforts may be crowned by success."

The group rose and stood in silence, with sardonic grins hidden by the more hardened. Sonorously, the General intoned certain ritualistic words of great piety, then nodded with solemn appreciation as the members of his staff murmured: "Amen."

After that, the General felt he had paid sufficient homage and proceeded to more practical matters:

"Gentlemen, we will now ob-

serve, through the medium of television, closed-beam, of course, the scene in the Control Room as last-minute preparations are completed. I am sure we will all feel a glow of accomplishment as we watch the flawless fruit of our labors rise into space." He turned his attention to an Intercom set and a large screen lighted on one wall of the conference room. The televised picture revealed a busy group of men in uniform checking dials and gauges furiously. The General nodded in satisfaction and asked of his Intercom:

"Is everything in order?"

Obviously, the Intercom was two-way since a smartly dressed Colonel spun around and saluted:

"Everything, sir. Fueling is complete and pressures in all missile stages satisfactory." He hesitated. "We would like to run one more test on the fuel mixture, sir, and re-calculate a minor point. Could the launching be delayed a few hours to permit this check?"

"Nonsense, man." The General was irritated. "We are about to permit the ranking officials of our government a view of the launching. Their time is valuable, so get on with it."

"Yes, sir." The Colonel knew better than to argue with his superior. That was why he held command in the Control House, rather than other officers who proffered opinions of their own. "Zero is thirteen minutes, sir. May I ask if you care to test your firing control button?"

"With pleasure." The General fondly regarded a large plastic block on the table before him. From its center, like an unwinking eye, a red button stood out. One stubby forefinger came to rest on the button and the General asked. "When?"

"Now, sir, if you please." A faint buzz and a winking light on that faraway panelboard. "Very good, sir, it makes contact. We will close the circuit here when countdown reaches minus ten. Firing must take place at exactly zero, sir."

"I know that, man, do you take me for an idiot?" The man at the button glared at the screen and missed a faint grin on the mouth of Doctor Newmeyer. Instead, with no reply, the General could lean back and light a cigar, obviously in high good humor over his part in the show. Snapping his fingers, he cut the Intercom and spoke to the group around him: "Gentlemen, we are privileged to be present at an historic moment, but there is no reason for such serious faces. We will be lifting the shadow that has lain over the face of our nation for many years. Perhaps." He drawled. "We should have a pool on the size of the bag with this first shot." He waited but no one answered. The gruesomeness of betting on the deaths of thousands of people was too grisly for even the hard-bitten staff men. The civilians simply ignored such an obscene idea. Finally, feeling the disapproval, the General growled. "Forget it." And muttered to his

Aide. "Chicken-hearted weaklings."

After that, minutes ticked by. Fateful minutes slipping irrecoverably into eternity. The Intercom key was open again and the voices from the Control House clear and sharp. The group at Headquarters heard the telemetering stations report in turn. Abner, Barney, Chuck, Daniel, Elias. All the rest in alphabetical order. Then the stations that would observe any deviation from course, these known as yaw and roll stations. All these would report the flight till it passed the top of its arc.

When the stations were finished, the sections in the Control House itself reported. Tanks fully loaded, pressure satisfactory, stage separation devices in order. The trim Colonel checked all the reports on his data sheet, then gave out his last pre-flight order:

"Zero minus sixty seconds. Warhead arm and report."

Ten seconds more, while Doctor Newmeyer wiped a wet brow, and the answer came:

"Warhead armed to explode on impact."

Inexorably, the second hand ticked around. At zero minus ten seconds, the Colonel flipped a switch and glanced over a shoulder. Understanding the gesture, the General muttered:

"I have it all in my hand now." And his finger poised on the button.

"Five." Another vision screen

lighted to show the monster itself, erect on its launch stand. "Four. Three. Two. One."

"Zero." The General's finger plunged down and a great burst of flame and smoke, radiating mighty forces, swept out from beneath the missile. Slowly it lifted, then more rapidly. Gathering speed with each foot, it drove up and out of sight in seconds on that pillar of expanding fire. The visibly sweating Newmeyer muttered quietly:

"God forgive us." But no one heard him.

Abner reported:

"First stage separated one and three-tenth seconds ahead of schedule time."

Barney:

"Barney in. Missile five and two-tenth seconds ahead of the schedule from firing point."

While the next two were reporting, Newmeyer cried out:

"Destroy it. Order Command Destruct, General, it's going too fast!"

The General puffed on his cigar, undisturbed:

"Nonsense, man. Just a better bird than we hoped to get. Fine performance, fine."

"Elias in. Second stage separating. Fifty-nine seconds ahead of time. Speed—" A hesitation, then apologetically. "Speed must be rechecked, sir. Error in calculation."

"I'll break that fool." The General muttered to his Aide. "Imagine making a mistake at a time like this."

"Forney in." This voice had a

puzzled note. "Bird is on a course elongating above scheduled apogee. Distance traveled nearly two minutes ahead of schedule. Speed well above predicted calculations, sir." A hesitation. "May I offer an opinion, sir?"

The Colonel snapped, so they heard him at Headquarters:

"No. Clear air for next report."

"Gregory in." This voice was calm. Obviously the man at the microphone had heard Forney snubbed. "Missile still rising. Far above scheduled apogee. Missile operating beyond escape velocity and is leaving Earth."

In Control House and Headquarters, men leaped to their feet in dismay, the General roaring:

"Cut that fool off. Get his name and relieve him. Colonel, get the next station."

Silence for a moment, then the Colonel demanded:

"Hennessey, come in. Hennessey, come in."

"Hennessey in. Nothing to report. Nothing overhead, sir."

"There must be." The General's face was purple. "Colonel, are all your men blind or crazy? Get the path of that bird figured out."

The Colonel had been busy and had news:

"There is no longer a path, sir. Yaw and roll emergency stations agree with last reports. The missile has left our planet's zone of attraction."

In the passage of a few hours

after that fatal pronouncement, the General suffered countless humiliations. Military pride in presenting a triumph for the edification of ranking officialdom backfired badly. From Chief Executive down to the Under-Secretary, demands for explanations refused to take the plausible or expedient for an excuse. The plain truth was demanded and the tortured General lacked the power to provide that one thing; an honest explanation. Worse still, in trying to stave off various Chiefs of Staff, Senators and clamoring lesser officials, the General improvised details to conform to what he considered the importance or technical knowledge of the questioner in each case. To his horror, the civilian and military inquisitors began to confer and found out they were getting contradictory stories. The hitherto impregnable head of the missile program heard himself called a liar more than once.

Desperately, the General demanded of the men still seated in his Headquarters:

"Can't some of you give me a story that will stick and get us off the hook?"

The gray-haired Newmeyer asked, ironically:

"Us, General?"

"All right, all right. Me, then. What the hell can I tell these people? They'll have my scalp if I can't give them a better explanation than I have so far. I want an accurate statement that

will cover all we know of what actually happened."

"General." Newmeyer interposed, amusedly. "You are in no position to be demanding. However, some of my ex-colleagues who are, as you put it, under the displeasure of the government, can help you out, if you ask them nicely."

"Not yet, Doctor." The General flushed. "I'll have nothing to do with those— Hell, there goes that blasted red light again." Referring to a winking signal that told of some peremptory call that could not be denied. The beleaguered button pusher grabbed an instrument and snarled into it. "Yes, what do you want? Oh, Mr. Secretary, I didn't recognize your voice. Yes, I did. Yes, sir. Yes, of course. Immediately, sir. A full report in one hour? That is hardly possible— But, you see— No, sir, I am not being evasive. I will give you all the information I can get. Yes, sir, it will be clear and sufficient for your needs. Yes, sir, without fail." The General set the phone back on its rest and paused for what seemed a long time.

The group waited for his explanation:

"Gentlemen." A defeated General spoke. "That was not our own chief, that was the Secretary of State. He demands a full explanation and I do not have one. Our opponents, in the most diplomatic terms, have demanded an explanation as well. That demand is in the form of an ultimatum. I have just one hour to

avert catastrophe for our country. Who can help me?"

"Some of the men you turned out, General." Newmeyer let the knife twist in the raw wound. "Especially Dr. Heagney, the fuels expert. He was, if you may recall, exceedingly dubious about this launching. To be brutally frank, he said you were a murdering swine and left voluntarily. None of the others can answer this question as well since Dr. Heagney foresaw this result and prepared for it. I can put you in touch with him if you wish."

The General fought his mental battle alone. His Staff was no help and kept their faces averted till it was over. The watchers could tell when the decision was made by the bitter glance flung at the telephone. Then the General spoke:

"You win, Newmeyer. Where can I reach him?"

The gray-haired scientist replied:

"Permit me to place a call to York Observatory, General. I believe Dr. Heagney went there to observe the flight of your bird. He should have information of value to you."

Even though demoralized, Headquarters could still function efficiently, and did. Contact with the observatory took only minutes and the cool voice of Heagney spoke almost at once:

"Yes, General, I observed the flight. I will not congratulate you. Why are you calling me?"

"I need help, Doctor. In fact,

our country needs help. We are in a tight spot." He explained the situation.

"What do you wish to know?"

"First, why did it go so far off schedule?"

"That last fuel formula was an improvement. It should have been tested again."

The General knew from Newmeyer's smile that he recalled the Colonel making such a request minutes before the start of the flight, and turned red. Then asked another question:

"Well, granted you are right, where did the damned thing go?"

"I am right. And it went into deep space. Beyond any attraction of Earth's gravity. It will not return here."

"That's one relief." The General mopped his brow. He had been headaching for fear it would circle the Earth and come back to destroy a home city. "We can forget about the missile then?"

"Not entirely, General." Heagney's voice had an edge. "It is armed with a warhead. I suppose?"

"Yes, armed to explode on impact. Nuclear, of course."

"In that case, since our Moon is on the far side of Earth, the missile will head for the nearest heavenly body of size. Since that body is at inferior conjunction, it will probably be the next outward planet. Our neighbor. The system Doctor Newmeyer devised to deflect intercepting minor bodies will get it safely

through any meteor fields it happens to meet. The course of the missile, and the speed it was making, indicate contact in just seven days and four hours. With a small error percentage, of course. Since your nuclear device is probably a powerful one, the effect should be visible to all high-powered telescopes. Does that satisfy the military penchant for destruction?"

"Better than having it drop back on us, Doctor." A trace of arrogance was left in the military voice till the General recalled the diplomatic crisis. "I am required to submit an explanation that will hold water on the other side. Can you suggest anything?"

"Yes, I can." Heagney laughed, grimly. "It may surprise you to know the actual result of the launching was not entirely a surprise to me. After all, I created the fuel. To get back to your point; not for your sake; nor that of your stupid military clique; but for the sake of our common country and peace, I have an adequate answer. But it has a string on it."

"What is it, Doctor?" The General lifted a wet palm from his desk and wiped his head.

"I want positive assurance that no future missiles will be launched upon unsuspecting cities. Provide that assurance and I will give you the solution you need."

"I can't do that, Doctor. I have to obey my orders."

"Then get the promise from

your top echelon, General. I can hold this phone while you contact them. I know you are in a position to do so or you would not be so worried."

Contact with the State Department brought immediate agreement from the frantic Secretary:

"Yes, yes, General, promise him what he wants, but get the explanation we need. Those people are sitting in my outer office this moment, watching the clock. Our enemy has a missile nearly ready to fire and we have less than an hour to stop it. Get what we need and hold this phone open."

Heagney's voice was half-amused at the result:

"Quite an intelligent man, the Secretary. He realizes the surprise element is gone. I suggest you give this story to the press of the world, and our enemy. The missile was fired as a research vehicle into space. Fired deliberately, with full knowledge it would leave Earth. Give your snivelling virtue a pat on the back and proclaim yourself innocent of all harmful intent. The real brains on the other side will not believe you, but the public will buy the idea, I hope, and you will be famous. Tell the reporters the missile will strike on our neighbor in space at this time." A series of calculations was hastily copied by a staff member. "Tell them we invite their collaboration in observing the fall and suggest a pooling of re-

sources in further research. They won't do that, and we probably won't either, but it sounds good. If you cannot sell the space vehicle idea—" He paused.

"What then, Doctor?"

"If not, General, we can continue this discussion in some theological warmer climate. Good day."

Duly, the answer was released, publicly and diplomatically. A half-sneering Foreign Office across the ocean was obliged, by pressure of public opinion, on the wave of public enthusiasm over this real conquest of space, to accept it. This was no satellite circling the Earth, but a real drive into space. The fury of an undeceived enemy military clique was held back pending the fall on the neighboring planet. A compromise was worked out to delay any decision till after the scheduled impact.

And there matters remained while others made the decision.

"Going out to spy on the neighbors, Father?"

"That," came a half-amused rejoinder from a mature-looking individual checking space gear, "is the poorest possible way to describe a simple surveillance mission that I ever heard." He tossed his equipment into the counterpart of a duffle bag, and sighed. "Circumstances such as your mother liking a very fine garden induce me to volunteer for this duty once in a long while. The credit bonus for space duty brings our family a bit of

luxury otherwise denied us. And this tour will really be a very easy one. The Council desires to keep abreast of the late scientific developments on our neighboring planet. Without any revelation of our presence."

A soft voice interrupted, calling over a communicator:

"Turan. Turan. Attention, please."

"This is Turan." The father answered.

"An air car will pick you up in a short time. Please be ready."

"Certainly." Turan turned to his son again. "I wish I had arranged for you to accompany me this time, but I know you and a certain young lady have no desire to be that far apart. You will both be here to keep your mother company while I am away, I trust."

"Yes, Father." The young man smiled. "But she refuses to take that seriously. I believe she mentioned something about just being comforted by our presence and that she would keep the children from bothering us. Here she comes now."

Turan's eyes softened at the entrance of a beautiful woman:

"My dear, the air car will be here soon. A moment with you and I had better see the rest of this tribe of savages we have inflicted on a long-suffering civilization."

"That is no way for a doting father to speak of my five lovely babies." His wife smiled, then a shadow crossed her face. "I wish you were coming home, instead

of going to check on the real savages of our system." She shook a foreboding head. "I always wonder what would happen if you were disabled and cast away among the people of the Third Planet. Those wars and the planning they do between wars on how to fight the next. They are not my kind." She shuddered.

"Hardly." Turan's lips compressed. "We actually had to go and observe them to learn what war could be like. It woke some of our more complacent citizens out of our pink dreams. Some exchanged the dreams for nightmares about what would happen if the Third Planet people achieved a method of space travel. I grant they are not particularly virtuous, but the very fact of an existent civilization tells us there are men of intelligence and forebearance among them."

"And some rather good-looking women." Her son laughed. "I saw some of the filmed reproductions of their broadcast programs. Mother, one of our ships delayed reporting for more than two hours because the crew were watching a contest to determine the best looking. Father, your face is getting red."

Turan waved a hand:

"Your mother could have won the contest with her hair upset and wearing her oldest clothes. We were just commiserating with the poor creatures over their ill-fortune."

Turan's son smiled at the evi-

dence of affection between his parents and commented, softly:

"Father, when you come back, give me a short course on a series of replies like that, will you?"

The air car came soon after and lifted Turan away from a happy home, a devoted wife and the five children, plus a new face of great beauty. Melody, soon to be the bride of the oldest son. Turan sighed at leaving them but consoled himself with the thought it was only for a matter of thirty days and the duty would be over for a year. Home was a peaceful place and his world one of carefree plenty.

He arrived at the spaceport and greeted comrades who would share the month-long vigil. Interested exchanges related to family affairs since the last tour of duty with a tale of the births, marriages and the few deaths. Normal human gossip of any planet, even the civilized Fourth.

Then a lighted screen at one end of their comfortable quarters drew attention. A pleasant face appeared and a voice greeted each man by name. Nothing of hurry in the procedure since there was no need to hasten either briefing or departure. After a few minutes, the voice from the screen spoke casually,

"There are a few items of news from the ship now on patrol that may be of interest. As you gentlemen realize, a crisis is approaching in the affairs of our neighbors nearer the sun. Their

major effort still concerns destructive weapons for use on other nations of their own world. Two main forces, with opposed ideologies, are leading the effort. Neither ideology is of great virtue except in their own propaganda releases to their own people. The progress in developing the weapons is hidden from the civilian populations except for boasts of superiority over the opposing forces. The entire matter is called classified." A note of amusement came into the voice. "Various grades of classification but one and all contain information known to the enemy Intelligence Section. As we could have predicted, the chief result of such classification of information is to furnish a smokescreen for the expenditure of funds without an accounting to the people who supply such funds. At this stage, the military plan self-governing missiles bearing nuclear warheads strong enough to destroy whole cities of the enemy. Their range will be great and speed sufficient to very nearly attain escape velocity. Experimental types have made a few trial runs and put small globes into orbits for checking of temperatures and so forth. In a year or two the missiles will be operational and put into production. A monstrous whirligig of destruction that may wipe out all life on the Third Planet."

"You said, self-governing," a quiet inquiry, "inferring unmanned vehicles, I presume?"

"Exactly. They are designed

for destruction, not exploration. The better scientists working on this program delude themselves into a belief that the very destructive power is so great that an era of peace will ensue and space exploration follow. A search of the motives of the governing powers indicates otherwise. Perhaps common sense will overcome idiocy in good time but at present indications are that destruction is much more likely. If our neighbors worshipped one official god, his name would be Stupidity. Good trip, gentlemen."

Turan's ship drove toward the Third Planet for approximately two Earth days, then took another to locate and reach the ship they were relieving. Visits took place between the crew coming on duty and that leaving for home. The senior of the home-bound ship waved a hand at a young crew member and told Turan:

"Junior, here, claims he caught something on an official band from below about launching a missile into deep space. We have nothing confirming it. The records I have checked over show no power developed sufficient to get a ship into deep space and our neighbors are not the kind to spend credits on a pure research program. Without blowing loud trumpets about it, anyway. We think the boy caught another of those fantastic concepts that are so popular on juvenile broadcasts. We monitor some of those occasionally to see

what the other half thinks of our way of life." He grinned. "You fellows meet any space pirates on the way out here?"

In the general laughter, Turan patted the young man:

"Never mind, you and my boy can enjoy a laugh at this when he comes on duty. I admire your sense of responsibility to report the incident, knowing these old buzzards would laugh at you."

"Thank you, Turan." The young man felt better.

"Not at all. Consider this, though. Our neighbors would aim any first space vehicle at their own satellite. It is the obvious target for ease of impact observation. I cannot conceive of even our idiotic neighbors deliberately firing a missile into deep space at random. Naturally, we will continue checking and I will send you a personal message if we find a confirmation of any kind."

He waved the effusive thanks:

"Just like to see these old buzzards bowing from the waist if you were right and they missed something that important. If you find time, advise my family we arrived safely on station. Good-bye, for a while."

For several days following, the ship bearing Turan circled the Third Planet. Days in elapsed time but all on the dark side of Earth, the better to escape counter-observation. Violations of this rule had brought unpleasant publicity in the past till it was now standard practice to stay in the shadow.

Living and listening on the dark side failed to provide real news but the general tenor of the Earth broadcasts puzzled the crew of the spaceship. Turan conferred about it with his next in command:

"There is something strange going on. The two major opposing parties are referring to an observation of something in their immediate future. As if they were cooperating instead of quarreling. Yet there is a definite tension in the air. Their confounded aircraft are very active, as well, and I have been unable to find a clear area to sit in close and get a factual news broadcast. I suspect a general news censorship is in effect on something. One other odd notion bothers me."

"What is that, Turan?"

"Just that all the circumstances fit the idea that a space vehicle could have left Earth. I know it is ridiculous but all these sudden public statements about peace and research have a fictitious sound. I reported my theory before my last period of sleep. Did Base have any comment?"

"They asked if you were feeling well."

"I thought they would. Well, I'm going to sleep again now. Keep the usual lookout and monitoring but please rouse me if you observe any unusual activity below."

Hours later, Turan rolled over and yawned. Then glanced at the

time-measuring device above his head. He started. There should have been a call for him nearly two hours back. The ship was extremely quiet, too. Perhaps the rascals were moping and homesick. Tired of watching a foolish race of people rushing along to self-destruction. A waste of time when family men could be where they enjoyed life most; at home. With that, the thought of Turan's own home came easily. Thoughts of the lovely woman who would be sitting in the garden nights now and watching the sky for his return. Or perhaps, a smile curved his face, the garden would be pre-empted by the young lovers these nights. A flashback came to Turan of his own days of courtship and the slender girl at whose approach he always thrilled and, at whose departure for however brief an interval, he had always felt a pang. Ah, but he still felt he was in the best time of life. The girl he had always loved matured beside him. The family that was part of both of them and, last of all, this eldest son with an intended bride. The whole universe could give him nothing more. Maturity brought the heaped-up rewards of faith dating back to that point in time where a man, or woman, found the other and one could say, in all truth, this is where life began.

His pleasant reverie was broken by a tap on the door:

"Turan, strap in. We are going to accelerate."

"Accelerate?" Turan leaped from his bunk. "Tell them to wait a moment." He ran from his cabin to the Control Room without waiting for further information.

A group of grave faces turned to meet his own. One of the men spoke with a deference strange among his people:

"Turan, orders from Base are to take position behind the satellite of our neighbor and await another ship. We are not, under any circumstances, to take a chance of being detected by the people of the Third Planet. This is a directive."

"But why?" Turan was puzzled. "Why all the mystery? Did they give you any clue about the change?"

"We questioned all we could but they were quite evasive, my friend. Frankly, we believe they have information lacking to the people of our ship, serious news of some kind. But there is no use speculating, we just have to wait."

They waited two full days while idle conversation on such matters was kept at a minimum. Turan's one query was rebuffed by the Base at home. Rebuffed pleasantly enough but with a definite refusal to release information. And, from their concealed position, they could get no news from the Third Planet.

Then the relief arrived. Not one ship, but many. Among the fleet, to Turan's amazement, a mighty vessel customarily reserved for explorations of great

distance under rigid and dangerous conditions.

Without ceremony, Turan and his crew were invited to board the interstellar ship and escorted to the Control Room.

For a space of seconds, there was no sound in that assembly except a few harshly indrawn breaths that had the impact of blows. Turan, himself, stared helplessly at the speaker while his own personal world slowly crumpled into chaos. Half-doubt, horror and utter despair flooded his mind in a rising tide as he sought helplessly for some relief to the grim tidings. Into his memory came flashing visions of the beloved group he knew so well, and would know no more. The comrade seated on Turan's right reached out to touch his friend in sympathy, then dropped his hand with a hopeless gesture. Violence in death was horrible if it touched just one person of their world. The passing of a whole family overwhelmed them. Without exception, they suffered with their comrade.

Finally, Turan asked, in a ghostly voice:

"What caused the explosion?"

"A missile." The Council Head replied, with a trace of bitterness even in his quiet tones. "A missile launched by the people of this world we have been observing. As soon as we reached the scene and discovered radioactivity present, a check was made of the meteor control devices and the path of the incoming object

pointed back to the Third Planet."

The group could all understand that statement. They knew the infallibility of the instruments set to destroy minor meteors and deflect the larger to uninhabited areas. The thin atmosphere of the Fourth Planet and its proximity to the Asteroid Belt had caused unfortunate accidents in the past. But existing safety measures had been sufficient up till now.

The calm voice answered incoherent murmurs of inquiry:

"The deflectors should have given warning of this monstrous object approaching, but the device was built, the recorders noted, with instrumentation of fiendish cleverness. It sheered away from all our deflectors and resumed course with the aid of its own mechanisms. That we can deduce from the tapes. It was a war device and the launchers foresaw the possibility of their enemies trying to destroy this weapon, so provided for that contingency. We, with no malice toward a living creature, have fallen unsuspecting victims to barbarism."

Suffering was there, suffering of the most intense nature, and bewilderment as well. Why? The question unspoken, yet so apparent to the observer. Why should such a tragedy have happened to him? He was a man of normal emotions, yet a man of a mature civilization and not given to foolish outbursts of indignation. That he hid what he could of his

sorrow in no way lessened that grief.

The Council Head sighed, recalling the plan devised on the long voyage from their Base:

"Turan," he spoke gently, "it is not our thought that this outrage shall go unanswered. Are you sufficiently composed to hear the result of our discussion?"

The bereaved man shook off his misery and asked:

"What is your plan?"

"We have several choices. The first thought was to destroy these people utterly."

"No." Turan's answer was simple, yet final.

"We did not believe you would condone this course and honor you for your agreement that we must not descend to savagery. If you had insisted, we could have turned this planet into a minor sun. But indiscriminate murder is beyond the moral capacity of our race, so the idea was merely mentioned. Another alternative is to allow these people to go their way, trusting that the seeds of their own destruction would germinate and destroy their civilization, if such a culture can be called civilized. This again is merely murder by remote control. A third idea was to play at god-like stature, and attempt to frighten them into some sort of peace with each other. A poor method, in the opinion of the Council, since there are men of great reasoning power among them. No, none of these methods seem just or fair. We have one more, and it offers a challenge to

our neighbors and a means of eliminating danger to us in the foreseeable future. Let me present the outline."

A stir of interest arose among the men who had not been present for the Council decision. The history of the unhappy Third Planet was generally known to the listeners and they wondered, collectively, if any cure for a world-wide mental illness was possible.

"Every planet with an atmosphere includes a band of air called the ionosphere both by us and the people below. In addition, they recognize something called the Heavyside Layer. Our neighbors use this particular layer to reflect etheric signals at varying angles and so communicate. A clever device, but they have no knowledge of the real function performed by this Heavyside Layer. We have learned that it serves as the positive pole for the motive force they call electricity. Just that. The negative pole is the mass of the planet itself. By using the powers within our scope to affect this ionosphere, we can destroy the Heavyside Layer, remove the positive pole and eliminate their electricity. Without the positive component, nothing electrical will operate on the Third Planet. They will be thrown back on the use of water vapor and mechanically-heated fuel oil for power supply. Even the nuclear devices require electrical energy for operation. Men of their science could combat this

effect and recreate electrical power if they devoted themselves to pure research, but we doubt their willingness if they realize it means the recreation of the war missiles. The changes in their culture will be painful and widespread, but they can adjust if they are determined to survive. All that is now accomplished so easily will require human labor. This is the decision of the Council. I trust it meets with general approval."

Turan came slowly to his feet and his drawn face reflected a harrowing inner struggle. Yet, as he spoke, there was a majesty about the man that lent a singular beauty to his features:

"I must register a protest against this action."

The Council Head nodded, gravely:

"Of all our people, you have the greatest right to be heard. Speak."

"This action decided upon by the Council seems to be just a substitute for immediate destruction. Will not these people sicken and die if deprived of light and heat? We pride ourselves upon our rise from the abyss of savagery and now we intend to exert the knowledge we have gained in wrecking the painful progress of these people who bear our shapes and may, at some future time, be well worthy to be called our brothers. If we smashed, burned, looted and finally obliterated these men, women and children, would such a course bring one breath of life

back to those who were our loved ones? I cannot, in all conscience, approve a course that will render whole races of which I have little knowledge the same feeling of futility that lies in my own mind. They would never know why such a punishment was visited upon them. Is this the justice of my people?"

The stir of comment rolled about till the Council Head let his soothing tones roll out again:

"Were this so, we would indeed be no better than those upon whom we pretend to sit in judgment. However, this is not the entire case. A balance was struck before this method of eliminating danger was approved. The immediate loss of our neighbors will be their eventual gain. A second effect, beyond the loss of electricity, will be the creation of a shield that will deprive them of any view of the heavens. The heat of the sun will be absorbed by the changed layer effect, and not escape as readily into space. A modified form of this effect on our home world ensures more equal distribution of heat and light. Even if it prevents accurate observation of the surface of our planet from any point in space. So it will be with our neighbors of the Third Planet. The climate will approximate late spring as it now exists in their moderate climate. Condensation of moisture will even out and the ground attain a greater fertility. Granted their color senses will be dulled to the more neutral tones,

but the senses themselves will be dormant, not destroyed. Lands now in desert condition will become arable and a greater plenitude of food be available, if they work to produce it. We really think they will be far better off than at present, since the principal motivation for war will be gone. The facts are reduced to these. This world below us will become an entirely agrarian civilization. Again, if they work, they eat. If not?" He shrugged. "Best of all, their capacity to harm others will be restricted. If our neighbors wish to throw spears at each other, they can do so, but it will be within their own circle. Apart from the loss of electricity will be their loss of the glory of the stars. We have polarized our shield to permit our people to see the heavens, but such a move is not included here. The living generation will mourn this loss, but it will only be a folktale to the next and deteriorate into tribal memory afterward. In two hundred years of Third Planet time, the common people will scoff at the idea of heavenly bodies of light beyond the silver of their sky. It will be beyond conception."

Turan asked:

"Is this shield irremovable?"

"Not quite. We can continue observation of this planet by means of channels known to us alone and may, at some future time, slowly reverse the effect when we feel they can be trusted. The rest is in their own hands, for better or worse." He looked

directly at Turan. "Is there any further objection?"

Turan spoke slowly, as one weighed down with responsibility:

"I think that I would rather die than lose sight of that glory we call the heavens. In the sight of the universe, I find the promise of the future that is my reason for living. Yet it is undeniably just that those who desecrate that glory shall be deprived of it." He let his outstretched hand fall to his side, heavily. "I withdraw my objection." With a firm, yet dejected step, he left.

An elderly man leaned on a hoe and glanced wearily up at an eternally gray sky. A sigh escaped him and he let languid thoughts carry him back to another day. A day shortly before confusion came to the world he knew then.

Today he was comfortable, well-fed, and happy enough in a family group where health was of prime consideration. Science had very nearly eliminated disease and deaths from injury were few. The slackened pace of life provided a margin of safety.

But something was lacking. Something his descendants would never know, he guessed. Even now, the younger generation snickered as the old people mourned and talked of other days.

There had been death and terror running loose for a while. Many had died of fright and more of laziness before the truth

penetrated the minds of the survivors. To eat one must work.

A whistle from a train passing far down the valley brought the thought of far places. Those far places that used to be so close when the jets thundered across the sky, their sound trailing them by many seconds. Instead, one heard the clatter of that confounded windmill. Lousy mechanical device. Pumps that depended on steam or expensive oil. Cars that were few due to the same reason. Except for health, life had much of the 19th Century about it. News that took weeks arriving from any place overseas and was not worth repeating when it was heard. Not much incentive for organization, particularly with the rising generation content in tribal groups and fat with food from fertile lands. Men just did not seem to have the right incentive these days. Everybody, except the men of medicine and the allied fields, seemed to be degenerating into farmers and discussion into boasting about crops.

Crops. He cut a dulled brown weed from among the stalks of ripe gray grain and wondered. Was it better this way? He was living far longer than he should have expected and others were robbing the grave, too. Perhaps

life without luxury had the advantage of greater length but it lacked the color he loved. And color? In the sense of shadings, that was the worst of all. Better not even to think of scarlet, blue and green. They were memories with so much of the vanished life before the Change.

Lastly, the Change itself. What had caused it? Some of the scientists suspected something, he knew, and a few even had an idea how to gradually overcome what had happened. But they all clamped their lips on the secret like Doctor Heagney, renowned today for his elimination of diseases. Heagney, blast him. A man who would not conform, even in the old days. The General-turned-farmer thought of that conversation on the day the Armed Forces were disbanded for good. Heagney had smiled and made a reply the General remembered:

"What brought on the Change? Why, I think we attacked the stars by firing that missile at random into space. We did a lot of damage, as we all observed. But we know there is no life on Mars, so no one was hurt. But," a smile on the grave old face, "the stars fought back. Just that, General, we attacked and the stars fought back."

THE END

VENUSIAN, GET OUT!

By ROG PHILLIPS

ILLUSTRATOR DUNCANSON

You and I are civilized, enlightened, sensible. We love everyone and are above discrimination. Or so we truly believe. But if a web-footed Venusian moved in next door, could we accept him as a brother—as an equal? And then again, how would the Venusian treat us?

SCREWY-LOOKING creatures, those damned Venusians. Neither animal nor reptile but something in between, with hair branched like feathers. And blue skin. All right in their place, but as neighbors? Uh uh! Anyway, everything was going to be all right now. That injunction would stick. It had better stick!

Charlie chuckled and lazily stretched out more comfortably, resting his legs on that coffee table Mr. Ki had given him—the poor sucker. He chuckled again at the memory of what had happened.

That Venusian family, the Kis, had driven up next door in a brand-new 1992 Emperor Sedan with a moving van load of furniture right behind them. They had had to turn

right around and go away again, too, when the waiting sheriff served the injunction! But before they left, Mr. Ki had climbed into the load and brought out this coffee table and given it to him as a present. Ki had been pathetically insistent that he accept it.

What Mr. Ki didn't know was that Charlie was behind the injunction himself. It had been the doings of the property owners' association, but Charlie had rammed it through the business meeting and it wouldn't have gone through if he hadn't. The other owners were wishy-washy.

But not him. He and Madge had taken a drive on Sunday and had gone over to that section the other side of town where a few Venusian fami-



The gesture was universal. It meant OUT in any language.

lies had already gotten in, and that had been The End, so far as he was concerned. Why, they kept their back yards flooded and muddy all the time, and grew the damndest stuff. It had bright yellow leaves and smelled like the tide flats that time he and Madge had taken a vacation trip to the west coast. People said you could get used to it, but Lord what a stink. He didn't want anything like that next door!

What did they want to let Venusians live on Earth for anyway? Some crazy business about exchange privileges, but let them stay back where they belong. It wasn't right, having to pay taxes and then skimp to meet the payments on last year's 1991 Ford while the Venusian immigrant got a brand-new car paid for with *your* taxes.

That had been really great, though, them driving up with the moving van right behind them, and the sheriff waiting there, and handing them the injunction against moving in next door.

Charlie had been watering the lawn out front so he could take in the whole thing, and he hadn't missed any of it. And he had played the "kind neighbor" role, veddy soddy

about the "unhappy turn of events."

That beanpole Venusian, Ki, had been taken in by it, too, and very touched by Charlie's friendliness. He had insisted on dragging out that coffee table and making him a present of it.

Madge had been outraged at his accepting it when he brought it into the house. "Adding insult to injury!" she had ranted at him. But she had reluctantly admitted it was just right in front of the davenport, and anyway the Kis had already driven off in their new car with the moving van trailing along, so she couldn't make him give it back.

It was made out of Venusian hardwood of some kind, and that intricate scrollwork carving on it was undoubtedly done by hand.

Charlie studied it admiringly. It was the prettiest coffee table he had ever seen in his life. That scrollwork had something about it almost three dimensional. *Really* three dimensional. Those lines in the scrollwork seemed to curve this way and that, go over and under—

He couldn't take his eyes off the particular line they were following. It seemed to expand, come closer, get bigger,

until it went under instead of over; he could *almost* go under with it. Almost. *Maybe, if he tried a little harder, he could. . . .*

Alarm had nagged at him.

He wondered what had caused the anxiety, then remembered the car he had just passed. Damned crazy drivers. There was another one coming, now. Good thing nothing was wrong with his brakes. What had made him think there was in the first place? He couldn't remember. This annoyed him.

All that bother and fuss he had gone to, just because he had been so sure something was wrong with the brakes. The worst part of it had been that extra eight-block walk from the garage to the office.

Mac, the garage man, had said, "We couldn't find anything wrong, so we took off all four wheels and looked inside the drums. Everything sound as a dollar. We thought you'd want to be sure."

The thought entered Charlie's mind that maybe he wanted the brakes to go bad with Madge alone in the car. But that was absurd. Why would he want Madge to get killed?

He didn't, of course.

In the driveway in front of

the garage at home, coasting about ten miles an hour, he slammed on the brakes as hard as he could. The car stopped dead, almost making him bang his head against the windshield.

Why this sudden obsession with the car brakes? He slammed the car door in annoyance at himself. There was nothing wrong with the brakes.

He pushed open the kitchen door and went into the house. His annoyance transferred itself to his wife. Madge wasn't in the kitchen getting dinner like she was supposed to.

"Madge!" he called, crossing the kitchen to the door to the living room.

She was asleep on the davenport. He went over and shook her shoulder gently. "Wake up, Madge," he said. "I'm home. Had a hard day at the office."

She opened her eyes suddenly, and looked up at him.

"Wake up," he said mildly.

"I'm awake," she snapped. "What are you doing home early?"

"I'm not early," Charlie said. "In fact, I'm about twenty minutes late. I had to walk to the garage to pick up the car. I left it this morning to get the brakes looked at."

"Well, don't snap at me!" Madge snapped. "Can I help it

if you're so late coming home that I fall asleep waiting for you?"

He opened his mouth to protest at her illogic, then decided against it. Why argue? Especially since she was going to the kitchen now.

It was hard to figure the moods of a woman. Feeling sorry for himself, Charlie got the evening paper from the front porch and sat down on the davenport, stretching out with a sigh, his legs on the coffee table.

He didn't bother to open the paper. It rested unnoticed on his lap. He looked at the coffee table, and wondered what Mr. Ki and his two wives and four kids were going to do.

Maybe they would find some other place and not fight the injunction. Hell, Charlie thought, if the neighbors did not want *me* to move in a place, I wouldn't shove in where I wasn't welcome. Of course, the hearing in court was coming up in three more days. The best thing for Mr. Ki was simply not to show up.

Charlie grinned slyly. He had talked to Joe Dinwiddie on the phone this afternoon about it. They were all set to go. If Mr. Ki showed up to contest the injunction, Charlie would be all nice and sweet to

him. That was all fixed, so Ki would think that it was all the doings of the other members of the group and not him. He would make a mild plea for "fairness," but be damned sure he didn't make it too strong.

The trouble with Madge was that she was getting too lazy. Imagine! Asleep! Probably right now she was opening a couple of cans of stuff instead of cooking a real supper. He was getting fed up with things like that. And always whining.

If she were to kick the bucket it would be small loss. He could marry someone that had what it takes. That was the trouble with marrying when you're twenty-three. You married a girl a couple of years younger, like Madge, and by the time you're forty she's thirty-eight and all washed up. Whining all the time, and when you came home hungry because you were concerned about making the car absolutely safe you found her on the davenport snoring.

Well, there were ways to fix that. In spite of the detective books there were perfect murders every day. It wasn't too tough to commit the perfect murder.

Just offhand he could think

of one way that was perfect. Come to think of it, having the brakes checked would fit right in. He knew a little about brakes.

One thing, he had been good at imitating voices ever since he was a kid, and he could imitate Madge's dad perfectly. All right. The thing was to fix the brakes so they would go out suddenly. That would be easy, with nothing to prove later that they had been monkeyed with. Wrap cloth around a section of the tubing to one of the brakes and use pliers to bend it back and forth until it was ready to break open. Then call Madge and imitate her dad's voice and tell her her mother was very ill and not expected to live more than another hour. She would be in a panic.

Madge would run out and get in the car and drive hell bent for an election the whole hundred and thirty miles to Freeport to see her mother before she kicked off. And every few blocks she would have to slam on the brakes. About halfway there the line would break open and spill out the brake fluid, and there would be no brakes. That would be the end of Madge—with a little luck.

"Dinner's ready, Charlie,"

Madge said from the kitchen doorway.

"Okay," Charlie said casually, getting up.

"Canned beef stew!" he said disgustedly.

Madge shrugged.

Charlie made a grim resolution to go out to the garage after dinner and fix the brake line, and put his plan into operation tomorrow.

He picked up his fork and pushed it into the watery mess that was mostly potatoes with only a trace of beef—as though beef were something incredibly priceless—and looked at what he scooped up. Potatoes. Oh, there was a couple of strings of beef dirtying the side of one of the chunks of potato. Suddenly he wasn't hungry.

"I'm not hungry," he growled, shoving back from the table and getting up in a fit of disgust.

He went to the back door and took his hat and coat off the hook.

"Where are you going?" Madge asked.

"Out," he said tonelessly, turning away from her stricken expression.

As he backed out of the garage he saw her face at the window. What he had ever seen in her he couldn't understand. Well, by this time to-

morrow he would be free of her for good.

He drove fast, heading toward the city limits and open country where he could pull off somewhere, and work unobserved. It would soon be dark and it would be better to get it done while there was still light to see by.

He finally parked in a picnic spot on the river road. It was far enough off the road so that no passersby could see what he was doing.

Crawling under the car with a pair of pliers and a rag, he went to work on the left rear brake line. After ten minutes of strenuous work he began to realize that the copper tubing wasn't going to weaken from the little bending he could do.

Another plan came to him. There was a pointed tool something like an ice pick in the tool box. He drove the point into the tubing until he estimated that the hole it made would be a snug fit for a nail, driving it from an upward angle so that the nail wouldn't fall out.

When he pushed the nail into the hole it fitted snugly and the trickle of brake fluid stopped.

That would be good enough. One solid push on the brakes and the pressure would push

the nail out and drain the fluid. With no fluid there would be no brakes.

He drove back home slowly, using only the hand brake. After parking the car in the garage he looked to make sure the nail was still in place.

Madge was in the living room watching TV when he went in. He looked at her without saying anything and went back into the kitchen. He was hungry now. He looked in the refrigerator for the stew. It wasn't there. He found it dumped in the garbage can and settled for a sandwich thick with slices of ham and cheese.

With something in his stomach he began to relax.

It was a cinch, now. He knew how Madge drove. She zoomed up to a stoplight and slammed on the brakes, inches from cross traffic. All the time. If she were in a real hurry she would be even worse. There wasn't a chance she wouldn't be killed.

He awoke a couple of minutes before the alarm went off in the morning, rolled over—and Madge was already awake, smiling at him.

He smiled back and reached for the cigarettes on the night stand. They smoked without talking, bare shoul-

ders touching in an intimate, comfortable way.

Sometimes, Charlie was thinking, this minute or two is the best part of the day.

He had completely forgotten about the brakes on the car, and as he shut off the alarm and got out of bed he was already in the automatic, habitual groove that would carry him through shower, shaving, dressing, breakfast, and driving to work.

The sun shone brightly through the bathroom window. It was going to be a perfect day. Maybe if things went smoothly at the office he could drive out to the country club after lunch and get in a few holes of golf.

Back in the bedroom again, he could hear the soft snoring of the percolator in the kitchen. He finished dressing. Tingling in every cell with awakened energy and life, he strode cheerfully into the kitchen.

Madge, having heard him coming, was already pouring his coffee.

"Good morning, darling," he said happily as he sat down and began putting cream and sugar into his coffee.

"Better hurry," Madge said as she always did.

"Uh huh," Charlie said unconsciously, giving his coffee a

final stir and picking up the cup.

He brought the cup to his lips. And it was then that he remembered.

He set the cup down quickly, coffee spilling into the saucer and over its edge onto the table. Madge, hearing the loud clatter of the cup, turned quickly from the stove. She saw the sheen of perspiration on his forehead.

"What is it, darling?" she asked, a tightness in her voice.

"Nothing," Charlie said. But it was something. *What if he hadn't remembered at all?* He would have gone out to the car and started to work as usual. Then—

He pushed back from the table and stood up, solemnly resolving never to commit another murder as long as he lived. It was too hard on his nerves—and no job for an absentminded man like him. That was certain.

"I'm not taking the car today, Madge," he said. "I won't have time for breakfast. Sorry. I just remembered." He went to her and planted a peck approximately on her lips, grabbed his hat, and dashed out.

The whole thing, from when he remembered until he went out the door, hadn't taken more than fifteen sec-

onds. He worried briefly about Madge suspecting.

At the corner he caught the bus. Actually, the bus was almost as quick as driving. And this morning it was better. It gave him twenty minutes to relax and get into the mood of imitating Madge's father over the phone.

Imitating someone's voice was a lot more than just changing your voice. It was slipping into the pattern of the person's personality, of thinking the same way, saying things the way that person would.

He thought carefully of what he was going to say. He would say, "Madge, mama had a stroke while fixin' breakfast. I'm at the hospital." (That would keep Madge from calling home to verify it.) "I think she's dyin'." That would make Madge forget everything but getting there as fast as she could.

Charlie rehearsed it several times in his mind. When he got off the bus and went into the office building he started for the bank of telephone booths, hesitated, then decided to wait until after the morning rush. In the morning congestion she might not have a chance to get up any real speed before needing her brakes.

Upstairs he nodded to the blonde receptionist as he crossed the plush waiting room and went down the narrow corridor to the door to his own office.

For the next hour he busied himself with routine work. Then it was a little after nine-thirty. The worst of the morning traffic would be off the streets. And he hadn't had any breakfast, either.

He went downstairs to the coffee shop off the lobby and had toast and coffee and kidded with two of the office girls who were taking their morning break early.

Afterwards he went to the telephone booths, and, taking a deep breath to steel himself, slipped into one and carefully closed the door.

Two minutes later he was out. It had gone perfectly. Madge had swallowed it without a shadow of a question.

Upstairs the receptionist said, "Oh, Charlie, your wife just called. She said she would try to call you later on."

"See if you can get her," Charlie said.

He stood by her desk while she dialed. She was a nice little number. Maybe he would make a play for her later on, after the funeral. He heard the faint buzzing from the

phone. She looked up, smiling into his eyes. He smiled back, then put on a slightly worried expression. "What did she say?" he asked.

"Just that she had to rush and would try to call you later. And if she wasn't home when you got there, the stuff for dinner would be on the stove."

"Okay." Charlie turned away.

In his office he started to work, but he couldn't concentrate. Somewhere in the city Madge was speeding along with brakes that would be no good any minute now. Maybe already it had happened.

Why had he done it?

The question kept repeating itself in his mind. Why had he killed Madge? It was senseless. He loved his wife. Not very passionately. They had been married too long for that. But he had been satisfied. There was no one else, either.

Yet suddenly, for no reason, it had seemed the most logical thing in the world to plan to kill her. Why? It didn't make sense. He looked back on it now with a feeling of unreality.

The phone rang. He picked it up and said hello into it. It was the boss asking him if the Stevens account was ready yet. He said no, he was still

working on it. When he hung up he noticed the brightness of his moist handprint on the plastic. Sweat, and the office was air-conditioned.

Why had he done it?

He felt sick inside. It had to be a mental illness. It couldn't be anything else. What else could it be?

A spell? Black magic? Ha ha. Purple magic. Venusians. But things like that were a lot of nonsense. It was a mental aberration, pure and simple. Maybe caused by a brain tumor pressing on his brain.

He would have to get an examination, maybe an operation.

He leaned back and closed his eyes. Imagine, a brain tumor pressing on your brain. No pain, nothing. Out of a clear sky you start planning your wife's murder—all because you have a brain tumor.

Sure, there were stories about secret rites of the Venusians, things science didn't know about. But Mr. Ki didn't even know he was behind that injunction to keep the Kis from moving in next door. Ki had even given him that coffee table as a friendly gesture.

The phone rang again.

"Mr. Charles Carter?" a crisp female voice asked.

"Yes?"

"This is the emergency hospital. Your wife was just brought in. A traffic accident."

"Is she hurt?"

"Would you please come to the hospital at once?"

"Is she alive?" Charlie demanded.

"Yes."

"Oh, thank God!" Charlie breathed. "I'll be right over."

"It's going to be all right!" he breathed happily as he ran out of his office.

"She's in bad shape," the quiet man who introduced himself as Dr. Smith said. "She crushed her chest against the steering wheel. The ambulance attendant had to attach a head circulatory and we rushed her into the operating room and sewed up the aorta. It had been punctured by a splintered rib. I think we'll save her all right, but it was close. There was no brain damage."

"When can I see her?" Charlie asked.

"Not until tomorrow. She's still under head circulatory. We'll remove it in a few hours—as soon as our tests show that her body is responding properly. There was some blood coagulation in her liver, but that was to be expected, with no circulation at all for almost twenty minutes. We

have a filter by-pass to keep the clots from lodging in her lungs any more than necessary, and we have her chest spread open so we can keep watch."

Dr. Smith patted Charlie on the shoulder. "Everything will be all right," he said. "We got to her in time. She hadn't been dead five minutes."

Charlie shuddered and sat down, his knees suddenly weak. A nurse came into the doctor's office with a cup of coffee.

"Drink this," Dr. Smith said. "It will fix you up."

"Coffee will fix me up?" Charlie said.

"This coffee will," Dr. Smith said.

Charlie gulped it down. A minute later he grinned at the doctor and the nurse.

The doctor grinned back and said, "It's a standard brew for the relatives of emergency patients now. It will keep you cheerful and optimistic for twenty-four hours, and it won't impair your thinking a bit."

"Where can I get more?" Charlie said. "I like the way I'm feeling."

"You can't," Dr. Smith chuckled. "I'd suggest you go home and stay there. Oh, by the way, the police want you to contact the accident divi-

sion. They'll tell you where your car has been taken."

The car. Would they be able to tell that the brake line had been tampered with? "Thank you, Doctor," Charlie said.

He took a taxi home. He let himself in through the front door, something he hadn't done in months. The house seemed very vacant. The drapes over the picture windows were drawn, as though Madge had expected to be away for days.

What would happen when she recovered and found out her mother hadn't had a stroke, and her father hadn't called her? She would know then that it had been him who called her.

He grinned cheerfully. Oh, well, nothing mattered except that Madge was alive. That was all that mattered. The rest would work out.

He should have asked Dr. Smith about being examined for a brain tumor. It had slipped his mind.

He turned away from the windows—and there was the coffee table Mr. Ki had given him. He looked at it, startled. It gave him a strange feeling. Into his mind crept a strong wish for Madge to die. Maybe the nurse would slip up when she pulled the tubes from the head circulatory out of the

arteries and veins in Madge's neck. Maybe . . .

But the thoughts slipped away, leaving only a cushion of cheerful optimism.

But why had those thoughts come? Was there something about this coffee table that produced such thoughts?

Nonsense!

He crossed the room to the kitchen, shoving the absurd thought from his mind.

The kitchen was bright and cheerful. The wall clock with its blue numerals pointed to one-thirty. There was a note laying on the stove.

Humming very contentedly, Charlie picked it up and read it. "Charlie," it read, "if I'm not back, there's potato salad in the refrigerator and some steak in the broiler all ready to turn on. I'll call you as soon as I can. Love, Madge."

Bursting into song, Charlie pulled out the broiler and saw that the steak was okay, so he turned on the flame.

He went to the refrigerator and brought out the dish of potato salad. It was the kind he liked best, the kind only Madge could make.

That damned coffee table! What did he want the thing for, anyway? He would get rid of it right now.

He went into the living

room and got it, and took it out into the back yard. Out next to the alley was a small pile of dried weeds and lumber scraps he had been intending to burn anyway.

He laid the coffee table on top and set fire to the dried weeds. The fire burned brightly, and when it reached up around the coffee table it licked at it hungrily, then began to eat into it.

Charlie returned to the kitchen. The steak was a little too done on the top side. He turned it over, and put a flame under what was left of the breakfast coffee.

Ten minutes later he put the sizzling steak on the plate beside a generous scoop of potato salad, poured a cup of coffee, and sat down at the table.

Good old Madge. She was a wonderful wife. A quiet sense of humor, never complaining—Well, not as much as the average wife he knew. Good salad. He smacked his lips over it while he put cream and sugar into his coffee and stirred it.

It was a little scummy on top. Maybe he should have made a fresh pot, instead of using warmed-over breakfast coffee.

He shrugged cheerfully. Why bother?

He sipped it. Bitter as the devil. He made a wry face and took a big swallow. In his stomach it exploded into agony.

Then his eyes grew round with surprised realization.

"So it *was* the coffee table!" he tried to say, but his voice came out only a painful croak. He knew he was dying.

"So this is death," he thought, and though the thought should have filled him with terror he felt only a mild bitterness and an underlying amusement tinged with sad regret.

"Why is that?" he thought. How could drugs the doctor had put in his coffee to keep him cheerful work on him after he was dead?

Maybe it wasn't the drugs. It was really amusing, sitting with his legs propped on that devilish coffee table plotting Madge's murder and never suspecting it was having the same effect on her.

She must have poisoned the coffee so he would drink it for breakfast! No wonder she had looked so strange when he choked on it and got up from the table and rushed out of the house.

That devil from Venus, Mr. Ki. He hadn't been fooled at all. He had known who was

behind the injunction to keep him from moving into the house next door, and he had it all planned. The perfect murder to get rid of whoever stands in your way. Be nice to them, give them a coffee table with some kind of hypnotic carvings on it that work on the mind.

A strong regret swept over Charlie. Ki and his family had been very likeable in spite of their alienness. It wouldn't have been so bad having them as neighbors. It was just the idea of it, was all.

Why wasn't he hating Mr. Ki instead of thinking of him as a nice guy? It must be the dope Dr. Smith put in the coffee. You couldn't be mad at anyone and in a cheerful, optimistic frame of mind at the same time.

But the dope couldn't be affecting him now, so maybe Ki was a nice guy.

"If I had my life to live over," Charlie thought, "I would let the Ki family move in next door."

But they would get to move in now anyway, with him dead. Still, if he had his life to live over he would let Ki move in next door.

Murder was a funny thing. Maybe it was what the docs call a psychological release. Kill someone, and whatever

reason you had doesn't exist any more.

Being murdered was even funnier. Dead, you begin to realize that all the petty angers and prejudices of life are not worth getting excited over.

And death—it was very peaceful. Very peaceful.

With a sigh of contentment Charlie opened his eyes.

He seemed to be in his own living room, lying on the divanport. In fact, the coffee table he had burned was directly in front of his eyes, real as life.

A few feet beyond it, sitting with his legs doubled under him was the Venusian, Mr. Ki, looking at him with round marbled eyes.

Hovering to one side was Madge. She had been saying something, but now she had stopped talking and was smiling at him.

"So you're awake, darling," she said.

Mr. Ki's blue face cracked with a friendly smile. "You haff gyuhd slirp, yesss?" he said eagerly.

Charlie didn't reply. He looked down at the coffee table, and reached out and touched it, feeling its seeming solidity.

"Mr. Ki dropped in to talk with you, Charlie," Madge said. "This afternoon when

they couldn't move in, you were so nice to him that he thought maybe he could get you to help him fight the injunction."

"This afternoon?" Charlie echoed, puzzled.

If I had my life to live over...

The thought went through his mind, crystal clear. He had been dead. None of it had been a dream. Somehow, some way, time had been turned back. He was getting a second chance. And with the realization that it was a second chance, a chance to do the right thing, came the realization that it was his last chance.

But with that realization came an overwhelming *desire* to do things right, welcome Mr. Ki as a neighbor. He looked across the coffee table into Mr. Ki's unhuman but wise eyes, and a slow smile grew on his face.

He sat up and scratched his scalp briskly, the smile developing into a friendly grin.

"Why, sure, Mr. Ki," Charlie said. "I'll help you. I, uh, have *some* influence in this community. Don't you worry a bit. I'll get that injunction killed—" He winced at the word, then his grin came back. "I'll get to work on it first thing in the morning, and you

can practically count on moving in tomorrow."

"Fanx," Mr. Ki said.

"Think nothing of it," You don't need to thank me. I should thank you—for the coffee table."

Mr. Ki looked puzzled. "Oh!" he said. "No—whlat you say—coffee table. Confession bench." He bowed slightly, a sly smile on his glossy blue features. "Verry good for soul. In fambly very long time."

"A CONFESSION bench!" Charlie said. "I'll be damned!"

Mr. Ki turned and shuffled toward the front door. Charlie watched him, a broad smile on his face. He ought to be mad at the damned blue-faced alien for playing a trick on him like that. He would be tomorrow when the dope Dr. Smith had given him in that cup of coffee wore off.

But there hadn't been a Dr. Smith! It had all been a dream in that mysterious soul-washing process!

Or had it?

Suddenly Charlie felt good. He sat down and rubbed his fingertips gently over the scrollwork on the Venusian confession bench. The Kies were going to be ideal neighbors. He was sure of that....

"Welcome, neighbor," Charlie whispered.

THE END

RESEARCH INTO DEATH

By DR. ARTHUR BARRON

Until lately, insurance company statisticians knew more about death than anybody — perhaps because their lives depend on it; their economic lives that is. However, their interest lies mainly in the "whens" involved. Now, the scientific research people are exploring death from the sociological standpoint, and have come up with some surprising facts. Doctor Barron sums these up along with conclusions reached by some of the top conclusion-reachers in a world where conclusions are pretty darned important.

THE phenomenon of death deserves deeper scientific investigation than it has yet received. Despite the fact that it is one of nature's ultimate mysteries, science has largely neglected it. Historically, it is the philosophers and theologians who have grappled with its secrets, not scientists. Even medicine is less interested in death as a subject of inquiry in its own right than for what it reveals about pathology.

There are exceptions to this, of course. The science of geriatrics is developing fundamental knowledge about longevity through study of the basic degenerative processes in living organisms. Experimental physiologists are conducting studies in the regeneration of human organs

which bear directly on the problem of death and which have important philosophical implications. Psychologists are beginning to explore seriously the interrelations between psychic states and death.

Work of this type is rare, however. In the main, death has not been a popular subject of research. What is especially surprising is that it has been less popular with the behavioral scientists than with the natural scientists, though the former deal with more accessible events.

Death Shapes Personality

The chief problem seems to have been that, almost without exception, the behavioral sciences have chosen to regard death as solely a biological

event, forgetting that its meaning for the individual can serve as an important organizing principle in his (and society's) life. A man's birth is an uncontrollable event in his history in which, by definition, he plays no conscious role. But men do have conscious foreknowledge of their death and this has enormous impact on the whole psychological fabric of their lives. Death plays a major role in shaping personality, attitudes, and behavior. What a man thinks of death, how he comes to terms with it, will help determine how he lives.

Societies, too, have to come to terms with death, develop values to interpret it, social institutions to manage it. Throughout history each society has given its own meaning to death. Ancient Egypt glorified death, established it as a central value in its culture. Ancient Greece despised it. The whole history of these civilizations can be interpreted in terms of these differing outlooks.

The contrast between medieval and modern man is almost as great. For the former, death represented the beginning of a moment infinitely more important than the moment of birth. For the latter, it is birth which is increasing-

ly regarded as holding the greater promise. Today, death has come to have different meanings for man and society than it did before.

Some of these meanings have been brought to light by depth psychology. Psychoanalysis in particular has demonstrated the varieties of meanings which death has for the human personality.

Freud Found the Basics

Sigmund Freud's insight into the "death instinct"—achieved not much more than a generation ago—plays a central role in the modern interpretation of death. Freud's great contribution was a demonstration that there exists within each individual forces clamoring for death (of self and others), destruction, aggression, ultimate and final dissolution. To these forces Freud gave the name Thanatos. (In some respects the concept may be likened to the physicist's notion of entropy). Opposed to Thanatos is Eros, Freud's name for the life forces—the urge toward reproduction, love, creativity.

Though Freud's propositions about death have not been entirely accepted, most observers do agree today that death does have meaning for

individuals as a form of outward and inner aggression. Studies of persons who have attempted suicide, for example, reveal that these individuals regard death as a means of vengeance to force others to give more affection than they are otherwise willing to give in life. Here, considerable aggression is turned outward. On the other hand, for some individuals death becomes a form of gratification of masochistic tendencies in the idea of perpetual self-punishment. This is clearly a form of inner aggression. Modern psychology reveals that such themes exist in varying degrees in all persons.

Many Themes Involved

But other themes are also present. Some persons view death as a welcome escape from what they consider to be unbearable life situations. For others it represents a final narcissistic perfection granting lasting and unchallenged importance. Some regard it as a form of intellectual fulfillment, as revelation of life's mysteries. For the religious, death promises immortality.

But while psychology and the other behavioral sciences have been successful in demonstrating the presence

of these themes (and others) in the individual's unconscious, they have failed to go further. Specifically, they have failed to achieve either a statistical description of how these themes are distributed in the population or what the social-psychological correlates of such themes are.

As a start, one immensely rich area for research resides in the problem of determining the salience of death in persons' attitudes. How often do people in our society think of their own death? Does it figure prominently in their thoughts about the future?

Of course, it is imperative to distinguish between personal intellectual awareness of mortality and emotional acceptance of it. The former is achieved rather easily, the latter is not. Indeed, many psychologists maintain that death is totally unimaginable to the unconscious, that deep within itself the human mind is utterly convinced of its own immortality. The fear that many have felt at one time or another of "waking" and "suffocating" in the coffin is but one example of the mind's unwillingness to accept the concept of a final end to consciousness.

Despite this, there is still considerable evidence that

people do muse on their own death a good deal. At the outset of many opinion research surveys, for example, respondents are asked to indicate the kinds of things they worry about. This is a good "open end" question, well designed to establish rapport and encourage participation. Significantly, about a third of all respondents in such surveys mention their health and the possibility of death as a central issue of concern. In this time of ICBM's it is not surprising that the proportion gives evidence of increasing. Of course, there is a tendency for older respondents to mention death more frequently than the younger.

When people are asked to indicate how *often* they think about their own death, about a tenth in some surveys state "weekly," about a quarter state "regularly, every month or so." Among persons over fifty, thoughts of death occur almost daily. This, incidentally, is often associated with regular reading of newspaper obituaries. More interesting (and more revealing) than the mere fact of reading the obituaries, is the macabre arithmetic some persons perform in connection with it. Thus, many admit to the regular practice of subtracting

their own age from the age of the deceased to see how many years "they have left," or, better still, subtracting the deceased's age from their own to see how many years they've "beaten death by." Obviously, this habit has a ritualistic quality about it which probably aims at the reduction of anxiety through mathematical "control" over death.

Suicide—Major Element

Suicide also plays a surprisingly large role in peoples' attitudes toward death. When pressed about it, nearly all respondents admit to having considered suicide at least once in their lives. A good many of these, moreover, actually gave serious thought to the problem of the "best" method.

Obviously, the evidence indicates that people *do* tend to think fairly often of their own death. The specific substance of their thoughts deserves study.

To what extent, for example, does fear play a role in attitudes toward death? Recent research provides insights into this.

There is good evidence, for example, that scientists and engineers are less likely to fear death (consciously, at

least) than persons in other professions, notably law, accounting, and teaching. One wonders if this is due to personality features which motivate individuals to choose science in the first place, or rather if scientific work itself creates an intellectual and philosophical environment which places death in a special perspective. Both factors probably contribute to some extent.

Other research indicates that it is highly ambitious and neurotically competitive persons who tend to regard death with most anxiety. These persons are terrified that death will interrupt their achievements, prevent the attainment of "success," and thus deprive them of the recognition (actually love) which they are desperately seeking to achieve. "If something happens to me," these persons fearfully ask themselves, "how will I become famous; who will love or remember me?"

Some researchers have drawn the useful distinction between the *process* of death and the *state* of death. They demonstrate that most people really fear the former more than the latter. The fear here seems to focus not so much on the expectation of

physical pain in the process of dying (actually, most persons are unconscious at the time of death) as on the experience of something eerie and mysterious over which the individual can exert no control. The thought of being helpless is extremely disturbing.

The state of death itself is regarded less anxiously. This is particularly true of those persons who regard death as the cessation of all consciousness, as "nothingness." Since such a state precludes sensation of any kind, pain or otherwise, death can hold no fear once it has been achieved. This image of death, incidentally, is very widespread today, even among those who claim church membership. This is not surprising since it is a point of view which is closely related to two major intellectual themes of the twentieth century — humanism and materialism. Of course, a belief in immortality still persists.

Dying Bravely—Important

Another factor which affects fear of death is sex. Though differences on this basis are rare, men do tend to be very much more concerned with dying "bravely" than women. The latter seem

relatively little concerned about dying with courage. With men it seems of central importance.

To help in achieving bravery men typically resort to two techniques: the belittlement of death through ironic humor, and the glorification of stoicism in the face of it as the supreme test of masculinity. Recent studies of male patients in a hospital ward for incurables, for example, emphasize the importance of humor in controlling fear of death. These men maintained a cash "pool" with which they took bets on the order of their going. Collections were accompanied with considerable joking and amusement. The theme of stoic masculine acceptance of death dominates much of contemporary literature. It is the chief theme in the works of Hemingway, for example, and accounts for much of his popularity.

The Economic Impact

Finally, as might be expected, death is feared by those who are concerned about its economic impact on family and, on a deeper level, by those for whom it signifies the end of life's enjoyments.

Perhaps the most fascinating findings to emerge from

current research into attitudes toward death involve individual expectations about length of life. In the main, research seems to indicate that a majority of persons are optimistic about how long they will live, but that a good many have morbid expectations.

When asked how long they think they will live, a sizable majority (85%) of young white males (25-35 years) in a recent survey indicated they looked forward to a "long life," anywhere from forty to fifty additional years. Such optimism is relatively common. (In actuarial terms it is also realistic for men of this age.) Interestingly, most of these respondents felt they would die "pleasantly," in their sleep, of old age, etc. Optimism about the time of death correlates with optimism concerning the manner.

The remainder of the sample, though, was pessimistic. These respondents felt certain they were doomed to an early death. Since none was suffering illness, this indicates a definitely morbid outlook. Naturally, most of these respondents felt that death would come "badly" — heart attack, cancer, automobile accident, etc. These results also tend to conform to general research experience to date.

What is needed, of course, is an attempt to determine what impels individuals toward optimism or pessimism about their longevity. Psychological guilt undoubtedly plays a major role in pessimism.

Of even greater importance would be an analysis of the actual relationships which exist between expectation of death and the events surrounding it. Work done at the Menninger clinic suggests that there may well be a causal relationship between psychic states and death. Certainly, there is evidence enough of psychic causality in illness. This would suggest that serious study of an individual's ability to "predict" roughly the time and manner of his death and even to influence these factors unconsciously would prove of genuine scientific value.

Children Understand Death

A great deal more information is needed, finally, on the problem of how individuals learn about death, what their initial image of it is, and how this changes through time. Today scientists agree that an individual cannot really comprehend death unless someone close" to him, in whom he has invested part of his own

ego, has died. Such a death is fully understood in emotional terms since it represents a partial death of self.

Children, surprisingly, are capable of a full understanding of death at a very early age, about five to six years. But familiarity with death so young generally has traumatic implications. Schizophrenics, for example, have a better than two to one chance of having experienced the death of a close friend or relative before six years of age. Similarly, many neurotic symptoms in adults have been definitely traced to childhood fears concerning death.

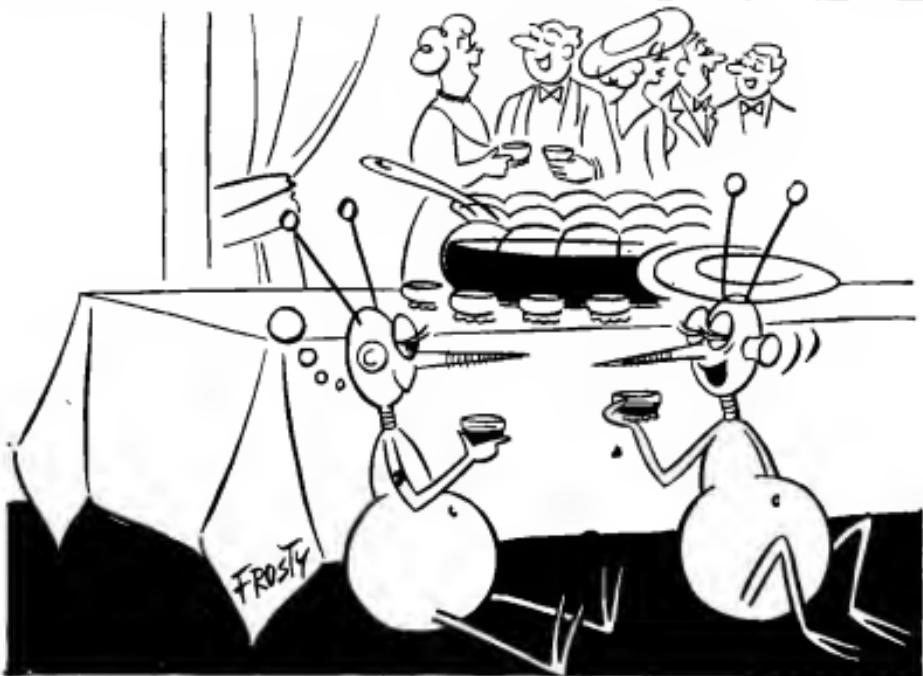
Preoccupation with death, of course, increases with age, as does pessimism about longevity. That age also produces greater "acceptance" of death, greater "resignation," however, is a cliche which merits criticism. Actually, research indicates that elderly people, provided they maintain their vigor and faculties, are more anxious about death, resent it more bitterly than younger persons.

Moving from the psychological to the sociological realm, it becomes clear that investigation is needed on the problem of what the broad attitude of our society itself is toward death. Specifically, we

need to know how death is treated in our value system, literature, and institutions. How "repressed" is twentieth century America about death? How do popular images of death get communicated? How does the theme of violence which dominates our mass media affect attitudes toward the significance and meaning of death? To what extent does our culture encourage self-destructive and aggressive instincts? These must be researched before a mature understanding of the social and psychological consequences of death in our society will be forthcoming.

Until now, both natural and social scientists have avoided dealing with death as a basic research problem in its own right. The reasons for this are not difficult to cite: psychological repression, cultural repression, the complexity of the problem and its basic inaccessibility to the experimental method, philosophical and religious hesitations, a lack of adequate research techniques. Today these problems seem to loom less large. In the near future we may expect science to reveal considerably more than it has in the past about the nature and consequences of death.

THE END



"Jumping Atoms! It takes a long time to get used to the water here on Earth!"



by S. E. COTTS

THE COSMIC PUPPETS. *By Philip K. Dick. 127 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 35¢.*

Do you think witchcraft is a thing of the past? Do you shrug skeptically when you hear tales of black magic and voodoo? Well here is a story guaranteed to restore these black arts to their rightful place on the bookshelf next to the detective story and the straight S-F yarn.

Ted Barton returns to his home town, Millgate, after several years only to find a strange city in its place. Nothing is as he remembered it—old familiar stores gone, the layout of the city entirely different. But even more alarming than these explainable changes are the ones that are beyond reason and experience—transparent people walking through walls; little clay golems running around like rats; a young boy and girl, each endowed with wonderful and terrible powers engaged in a frightening conflict with each other.

As Ted struggles to find out the truth behind these occurrences, he discovers to his horror that what is happening in Millgate is just the tiniest reflection of a terrible struggle whose battlefield is the entire galaxy.

The story is very well told. The sense of terror rises steadily and keeps the reader's attention at fever pitch by skilfully switching the narrative from character to character. A brooding atmosphere shrouds Millgate so completely that the reader is forced under the same black cloud. We recommend that you read it by all means, but we bet that before you go to bed you'll look under it to make sure there aren't any golems running around loose.

SARGASSO OF SPACE. *By Andrew North. 192 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 35¢.*

Take all the elements of a good sea yarn in the old tradition of

Conrad and Stevenson, then transplant the action to the sky instead of the sea and you have Andrew North's fine adventure story, *Sargasso of Space*. All the familiar characters and hallmarks of the sea tale are here, but in a fresh and vivid way—the eccentric captain whose cabin is lined with curios and photographs from the strange planets he has touched on; the green youngster, straight from the Trade School to serve as a Cargo apprentice; the cook-steward who is artistically inclined; the search for treasure; the shipwreck; a new land of *Limbo*; even pirates in modern guise.

Dane Thorson, the young apprentice, is assigned to the space-trader *Solar Queen*, an independent vessel, instead of one of the Company line ships.

This is a real old-fashioned adventure story, notwithstanding its setting in the future. But the interest is not merely confined to the action that occurs as the crew members pit themselves against *Limbo*. Our sympathies are simultaneously aroused by Thorson's personal efforts to find a niche for himself among the crew. Another winner by Andrew North.

DOOMSDAY MORNING. *By C. L. Moore.* 216 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. \$2.95.

This is a story with a major flaw, yet it cannot completely spoil the excellence of this taut, suspenseful spy tale.

Life was good to Howard Rohan. He and his wife, Miranda, were the most popular acting team in the country. On top of this, Comus, short for Communications U.S. (which actually ran the country) gave him a free hand in his work. But suddenly Miranda was faithless to him. In a state of shock, Rohan gave up everything he had worked for and joined the migrant Croppers. Then Comus started having difficulties; violence and rebellion sprang out in California, but Comus for all its power couldn't find the source. In desperation Comus pulled Rohan away from the Croppers and made him director of a traveling theater which would serve as a front for spying activities. Rohan succeeds in gaining access to the outlaws only to find his beliefs lie with them and that he is being hunted by Comus, too.

There is none of the fantastic or technological excess that mars so much S-F. But the author has, unfortunately, supplied her own brand of clutter—a superimposed identification making the hero's difficulties symbolize the troubles of Comus.

This kind of vehicle, when handled subtly, can increase the power of a story greatly, but in the case of *Doomsday Morning*, the author's use has weakened her accomplishment.

Be content with writing a good straight story, Miss Moore. It's rare enough these days!

I haven't written before because I thought that you would be busy enough without my letters, but I can be quiet no longer. I have read the letter written by Mr. Howard A. Leeson, of Alta., Canada. He fails to realize, as do many people, that fact is getting closer to fiction all the time. This man strikes me as one who has closed his mind to all aspects of future science advancements.

Many of your stories present the possibility of being true in some manner which shows to me the closeness of fiction to fact. As for this reader who so tears down *Amazing Stories*, let him think of the advancements this world has made in the field of science in the last 100 years and then try (if his mind is that big) to imagine what will happen in the next 100 years.

Gregory A. Richard
Hq. Sq. 4737th Air Base Wing
APO 862 New York, N. Y.

- You have a very clear understanding of what science fiction tries to do.

Dear Editor:

This may be a little late, but I'd like to say that I enjoyed your October, 1957, issue very, very much. Also those of us in UFO research who would like to acquaint more people with its meaningfulness are indebted to you for printing the list of books and other publications on the subject in the November, 1957, number. I rather imagine the October issue sold well, much better than the average—correct me if I'm wrong. One reader was of the opinion that it would have an overall boosting effect on your circulation. I doubt that merely one such issue will have the desired result. If you had at least one or two non-fiction saucer articles in each monthly number it would attract an increasing group of readers.

Personally, I wouldn't give two cents for the average s-f nonsense that gluts the market. I've tried to read one or two stories on occasion when I've had nothing else to do and always gave them up as a bad effort on my part. Shaver wrote the only so-called "fiction" that I could abide in that field, and I doubt that it was. His offering in the October issue was interesting but lukewarm.

Ray Palmer and Gray Barker were in their usual fine fettle. Arnold and the Air Force were respectively a mildly pleasant, and repetitive surprise. Mary Grabkowicz might well include among her scoffers the formidable "conservative" element who might not only succeed in dominating the field, but neutralizing it as well. Rev. Neal Harvey's philosophical observations had in them both the powerful elements of calculated truth, and unsuspecting error.

Oppositional views such as those offered by Oliver P. Ferrell and Lester del Rey (who wrote something similar for a competitor of yours) invariably reveal a strong tendency to ignore certain of the stronger points of evidence in favor of a lashing attack on some of the weaker aspects of the problem. An example of this might well be the Utah and Montana pictures that both Ferrell and del Rey artfully dodge in their criticisms. If flying saucers are a myth as implied by both these gentlemen in their articles, then this is the first time in human history that anyone has ever been able to take 16mm. color films of a myth—in motion!

I believe that most of us can look forward (and I'm being deliberately sardonic) to a steady dwindling of saucer contributions on the newsstands in the coming year, the watch and warders of "The Silence Group" will see to that.

What a commentary on our times that saucerdom is considered a greater menace than the "sex, sin and sadism" that floods the news-racks today!

Mr. Aden R. Major
1430 Mammoth Rd.
Dracut, Mass.

● *On the contrary, Mr. Major, we may well hear more and more about saucers. There is no sign of interest dying down.*

Dear Editor:

Why in the devil don't you tell your secretary to stop typing "Dear Editor" over all the headings of all the letters. It gets so sickening to see the same salute all the time.

H. B. had a good letter in the February *Amazing*. Whatever happened to Eando Binder? He was one of my favorites.

I actually liked this issue of *Amazing*! All in all, this was the best one all year.

Don Kent
3800 Wellington
Chicago, Ill.

● *Thank you very much, Mr. Kent.*

Dear Ed:

For some reason or another I found myself reading your issue of May, 1957, and the only items of interest in it, *for me*, were the sections "Space Club" and "Or So You Say." In the latter there were several letters which were not what one could say complimentary. As I agree with some of the things mentioned I have also decided to throw a few brick bats.

I've read your magazine off and on for a great many years and the only good thing you've had in your pages, since pre W. W. II is, in my own opinion, "The Green Man" by Hubbard.

The off and on mentioned above has only been in the last 10 years or so, since all that Richard Shaver nonsense and since, in the occasional issue I've had the misfortune to come across, I have found nothing . . . except your reader departments.

I don't know what kind of reader you are trying to reach unless it's the infantile and maybe you've succeeded in that for all I know, but I will bet that very few if any of the "old timers" read you nowadays.

Anyhow, for old times sake, here are a few suggestions that I'd like to see you try:

1. Longer stories and more full-length novels by some of the people who know how to write same.

2. Try, more so, to appeal to all levels of age and intelligence than what you are doing now.

3. Add a non-fiction section such as some of the other s-f magazines have. As you know, the "Age of Space" is here as proven by Sputnik I, and at least once a week or so you read or hear of some kid getting into some sort of trouble with a home-made rocket.

Once upon a time *Amazing* was the favorite source of material in my favorite subject, science fiction, and it would make me very happy to be able to say so again in the near future.

Robert R. Saum
Sfc. U. S. Army
321 Vine Street
Athens, Alabama

• *How do you like the changes that have been made since May, 1957, Mr. Saum?*

Dear Editor:

Many years ago in the late 1920s your magazine published two stories in succeeding issues by Phil Nowlan. These stories had considerable historic importance representing as they did the first appearance of the famous 25th Century hero Buck Rogers.

I do not remember the title of the first story. It was the best of two. The second was called "Airlords of Han."

The first story would pass muster as a first-class job even today. In it Nowlan anticipated the use of rocket guns a very new thing in those days.

I think that the new generations of science fiction readers as well as the old timers would appreciate reading those stories again. I would suggest that you dig them up and run them again. Buck

Rogers is still going strong and many of his admirers might like to start as we did—at the beginning.

Norwin K. Johnson
4935 Del Monte Rd.
La Canada, Calif.

• *We doubt if the current Buck Rogers would bear much resemblance to the original in the old Amazing.*

Dear Editor:

Science fiction fans will be interested in the following:

The Ninth Annual Midwescon will be held at the North Plaza Motel, 7911 Reading Road, Cincinnati 37, Ohio. On June 28th and 29th, 1958. The Seascapes Room.

For myself, I'd like to mention that I am looking forward to Dr. Barron's articles. I believe there is a great and heretofore generally overlooked field in "scientific extrapolation" as opposed to fictional extrapolation.

Dale Tarr
1940 Kinney
Cincinnati 6, Ohio

• *Dr. Barron has some real surprises in store for us during the coming months.*

Dear Editor:

Very good cover on February Amazing. Much better than the previous month.

It's good to hear you're expanding size to 146 pages. But I see you're going back to printing fact articles. Sputnik by now is old news. I believe that all of us who are in the least bit interested in space or s-f know most everything about Sputnik already. This constant repetition of things said about satellites is useless. What we really need is someone to outline a progressive program for our space development.

I still think that you're ashamed of your artists or something. Why not give them credit?

Peter Francis Skeberdis
606 Crapo Street
Flint 3, Michigan

• *Didn't notice that we were being repetitious about Sputnik, Mr. Skeberdis. Kind of hard to avoid the subject, though. Space launchings are a milestone in human history. Remember all the talk about the first atom bomb?*

ONE OF OUR CITIES IS MISSING

By IRVING COX

BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CONTENTS

1. THE FIRST TWELVE HOURS.....	75
2. THE FIRST TWO DAYS.....	99
3. THE FIRST TWO YEARS.....	133



YOU WILL MEET—

Jerry Bonhill. A young idealist with a big body and big fists. Older men look to him for guidance in a world gone mad.

Pat Thatcher. A man of undeveloped power. He lived to predict Bonhill's future and to prepare him for it.

Cheryl Fineberg. Red headed, fiery, vital. Along with her generation, she inherited bloody chaos and destruction.

George Knight. A gentle Quaker whose ideals were his life. He died horribly in defense of peace.

Anton Zergoff. A beast with a man's body. He waded knee-deep in blood but found no victory.

Boris Yorovich. A Russian soldier. He was brave enough to desert from the invaders and espouse an apparently lost cause.

Dr. Stewart Roswell. A brilliant educator. He stood face to face with the brutality he'd read of in his books.

Willie Clapper. A traitor for profit. The Judas-man who found contempt wherever he turned.

Chen Phiang. A soldier of Red China. Haunted by the ghosts of his ancestors, he could not remain an aggressor.

1. The First Twelve Hours

I. The City—Thursday, 6:50 P.M. Dr. Stewart Roswell

THERE were no crowds in the churches, no mobs in the bars. People did what they always had. It was an amazing strength of mind or a terrifying blindness: I didn't know which.

Half an hour before the broadcast, I drove downtown. I parked my car and walked toward the big hotel on the beach. Two women came out of a beauty parlor; I heard one of them whisper, "They say Dr. Clapper took off for the hills early this afternoon. He has a cabin up there, stocked with enough food to last him ten years."

On the terrace of the hotel I stopped to light a cigarette, shielding my face from the cold sea wind. The sun flamed red on the Pacific horizon. In the harbor I saw the dark silhouettes of freighters at anchor. At noon the navy had sailed for Hawaii.

A girl, as dream-like as the yellow organdy she was wearing, sat alone on a stone bench at the far end of the terrace. She was twenty, perhaps. Black hair framed her face like an ivory cameo. Her lips were very red, her eyes large and dark, her cheeks cold marble.

"I shouldn't have come," she said, smiling at me. "I wanted—I wanted something; it isn't here."

"My dear, no one can live a lifetime in an hour."

"The truth is, I was afraid."

"We all are tonight."

"I thought it would be easier if I could be where there were other people. It doesn't help."

I tossed my cigarette over the railing and sat on the bench be-

side her. "There's nothing to be afraid of yet. Perhaps they've found a way to work it out."

"Not this time; they can't."

"They always have before." I glanced at my watch. "It's almost time for the broadcast."

She put her hand on mine. It was long and graceful, as cold as alabaster. "Wait a little longer, please; I can't go back in there yet. I felt as if the walls were closing in on me, choking me; that's why I came out here—" She was suddenly shy, like a small child. "But I shouldn't be talking to you like this. I don't even know your name."

"Dr. Stewart Roswell," I told her. "I teach history at the state college."

"The Stewart Roswell? I've read your books."

That surprised me. My half-dozen books, warmly reviewed in the scholarly publications, gave me prestige but skimpy royalties. They were not what a young girl would pick up for light reading. The style was pedantic; the theme, international relations.

"I'm Maria D'Orlez." She held my hand gravely. "I was going to enroll at State next fall, Dr. Roswell. I counted on taking your classes."

Inside the hotel the throb of the dance orchestra stopped. I heard the sharp static of a public address system and the muffled voice of a radio announcer.

"The broadcast is beginning, Maria."

"Don't go in!" She drew me down on the stone bench. "We know what he's going to say—what he has to say."

For a time we sat together in silence. The girl was tense and her body trembled. I heard no sound but the muffled voice of the broad-

cast and, farther away, the rhythmic washing of waves on the beach. Even the traffic on the boulevard was still.

Suddenly people erupted from the hotel, running toward the street. Maria D'Orlez pulled me close.

"Stay with me," she whispered. "Stay with me."

II. The Highway—Thursday, 7:00 P.M. Jerry Bonhill

MOM stood in the doorway, twisting her hands in her apron. Dad sat on the couch, his face blank as if he were asleep with his eyes open. Mom gave him his usual glass of beer, but it stood untouched on the end table. We were watching the last part of "Doodle-Dan the Indian Man," kid stuff with a lot of old cartoons squeezed between the interminable commercials. But the program didn't matter. Not then.

Mom asked in a whisper, "Do you think he's worked something out?"

Dad shrugged and ran his hand through his gray hair. "We'll know in a few minutes, Abby."

I'm the baby in the Bonhill clan, nineteen last March. Dad sometimes calls me Postscript because I was born fifteen years after my sister Jane. I would have been in the army the way her husband Ronny was, but instead I joined the R.O.T.C. at the university.

"Doodle-Dan the Indian Man" ended with a trumpet fanfare. A flag came on the TV screen; we heard the national anthem. A network announcer said,

"We take you now to a government shelter somewhere near the nation's capital for this special report to the American people.

Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States."

Visual static disturbed the image for a moment. Then we saw the face of the President.

"Forty-eight hours ago," he said, with none of the usual boom you expect from a politician, "Enemy troops occupied Paris. The government of the United States submitted a formal protest to Moscow, which has been ignored. This afternoon the Soviets proposed a high-level diplomatic conference for the negotiation and readjustment of our differences. We have conferred before and the agreements have been subsequently violated by Soviet arms. We have lost Asia to Moscow at the conference table; we have lost Africa; one by one we have lost our allies in Europe, until today only England remains beyond the Iron Curtain.

"I speak tonight fully conscious of the unspeakable horror of atomic war. I give you my solemn assurance that your government has explored every honorable means for keeping the peace. If we are to survive as free men, we have no recourse left to us but war.

"Tonight I have asked Congress for a declaration of war—a holy war and a just war, to free the uncounted millions who are now enslaved by the Communist dictatorship. Many of you who are listening to me will die; many of our cities will be destroyed. But victory, when it is ours—"

The screen went suddenly dark. We heard another voice, a machine-gun burst of words,

"Red Alert, Pacific Coast. At five-fifty tonight enemy planes crossed the radar defense screen in Northern Canada. Estimated number, five thousand heavy bomb-



*Jerry
Bonhill*

ers. Following this announcement, all television channels will go off the air. Tune to local radio stations for additional directions."

For more than a minute we sat looking blankly at the screen. Mom clenched her fist against her mouth. Her shoulders were shaking. Dad got up and put his arm around her. Neither of them seemed to know what to do. I went to my room and brought out my portable. Only one Los Angeles station was still broadcasting. We were prepared for that. It was part of the C.D. plan, which had been discussed for weeks in all the papers.

As I tuned in, the announcer was repeating the Red Alert. He was choked off before he finished, and we heard a second voice, rasping and shrill with fear:

"The Civil Defense Organization orders the evacuation of Los Angeles. Use private vehicles as much as possible. Municipal buses will be available at terminal points. Speed is essential; the city must be cleared within four hours. Safe evacuation areas are designated as the Mojave or the Owens Valley."

The order was repeated over and over. I snapped off the radio to save the batteries.

In five minutes we were ready. I strapped our warmest clothes into a bundle and I scoured up two flashlights. I crammed the medicines from the bathroom chest into a beach bag. I took an axe, a hammer, and a couple of screwdrivers, as well as my hunting rifle.

As Dad backed our car out of the drive, I saw cars leaving other houses along the street.

"They always told us the shelters would be safe," said Mom. "It's sabotage, Chris; I'm sure of it. Subversives took over the sta-

tion and made that announcement, just to get everybody on the street when the bombers came."

Dad snapped on the car radio. "In that case, there should be a correction by this time." He tuned in the proper band, but all we heard was the same evacuation bulletin.

"Dr. Clapper said it would happen like this," Mom persisted, "if we kept coddling our subversives."

"Clapper!" Dad spat the word like profanity. "That's all we need right now—advice from that knuckle-headed half-wit."

Willie Clapper was Mom's knight in shining armor. Lots of people—women, particularly—fell for his line. He had once been a minister of a reputable church, but the congregation had kicked him out. Every Sunday, for more than five years, Willie Clapper had put on a half-hour TV network show; the time was paid for by an anonymous millionaire. Almost everybody made Clapper's subversive list: businessmen, professors, priests, writers.

Dad pulled the car to a stop when we were on the Freeway and asked me to drive. "We have to make time, Jerry," he said. "You handle the car better than I do."

It was the first time he ever made that concession.

From time to time I snapped on the car radio. Once I picked up the whisper of a San Francisco station, but that was all. The San Francisco announcer was reading an official bulletin. The invading fleet was close to the U.S.-Canadian border, still flying high in the stratosphere. The Nike and interceptor fighters had brought down better than a third of the bombers, and the government was confident that none of the enemy ships

would reach any important targets.

The bombers which had fallen carried H-bombs, built to explode on contact. A gapping wound had been torn across the face of Canada; most of the peripheral defense positions were wiped out; fire on a fifteen-hundred-mile front swept the northwoods. Scattered information from the surviving radar outposts reported a second enemy fleet had crossed the Arctic Circle shortly after seven o'clock.

"They're gambling everything," Dad said as the broadcast faded under a blanket of static, "on knocking us out with one sneak attack."

"Dr. Clapper warned us," Mom chimed in. "He said, if we didn't build our border defenses—"

"Damn it, Abby!" Dad raked his fingers through his hair. "This is real; this is for keeps! Can't you get that through your head?"

Mom and Dad always tore into each other when Willie Clapper's name came up. I was trying to think of a way to sidetrack the argument, when we heard the dull thunder of an explosion somewhere behind us.

Mom screamed. There were more explosions. Flashes of light, like heat lightning, flickered on the western horizon.

We were close to San Bernardino by that time. Both sides of the highway were crowded with cars, but we were moving at a good speed. The planes came suddenly, slashing out of the night sky.

Bullets splattered the cars. Somewhere ahead of us a gas tank exploded. I heard the terrified screams and the grinding of metal upon metal, as automobiles piled up on the road. The planes came again. Holes appeared in a diagonal line across our windshield.

Mom cried out and covered her eyes. Dad slumped on the seat beside her.

I twisted the wheel desperately to miss the wreckage. The car banged through the guard rail into a ditch. It lurched sickeningly, and righted itself again. Dad slid off the seat.

The rear wheels spun in the mud, caught suddenly, and hurled the car into an orange grove beside the highway. I jammed down the brake as the front bumper came up against a tree trunk. My head snapped against the broken windshield. I blacked out.

III. The City—Thursday, 9:25 P.M. Dr. Stewart Roswell

I STOPPED a stranger as he left the hotel; he said the Civil Defense Organization had ordered the evacuation of Los Angeles. For years they had told us not to jam the highways during an emergency. This last-minute change seemed pure hysteria, not good sense.

"Are you leaving, Dr. Roswell?" Maria D'Orlez asked.

"My dear child, I'm nearly sixty; at my age, a man doesn't start running for his life."

"You aren't afraid of the bomb?"

"I've learned to live with it."

"And the Russians: are you afraid of them?"

She asked the question seriously, her dark eyes large and intent. I tried to give her an honest, rational answer. "The Russian people are like other human beings; like ourselves. The tragedy of our time is that we were never able to find a basis for mutual understanding. The iron wall that separates us—"

"You wrote in one of your

books, 'The common man in the Soviet world is no more aggressive, no more warlike, than the average American.' Do you still believe that, Dr. Roswell?"

It surprised me that she had the wording so accurately. "I was writing about the general traits common to all people," I explained, "not a form of government. Keep that in mind, Maria."

"Oh, I wasn't being critical!" Her eyes were wide with innocence. "I agree with you completely."

I looked at her sharply. I had a feeling she was mocking me. She slipped her hand into mine. "Will you drive me home, Dr. Roswell?"

When we got into my car, Maria moved very close to me. "I don't want to go home yet. I want to see what other people are doing."

"But your parents, Maria—"

She smiled mysteriously. "They'll understand."

We drove through residential streets, where families were packing clothing and food into cars. I was surprised at the general orderliness of the evacuation, the absence of panic. You might have thought the people were all going on a mass picnic. They were cheerful, as if the whole thing was a lark; they called jokes back and forth; they were helping each other.

Maria D'Orlez seemed disturbed; certainly not pleased. A dark shadow of anger crossed her face.

"I'd better take you home now," I said when we returned to the car.

"Not yet." She glanced at a clock on a public building; the hands stood at eight-ten. "Let's go up on the hill, Dr. Roswell, and look down at the city—one more look at the bright lights before they're gone."

It was after nine when I parked at the viewpoint on the crest of the hill. The night was unusually clear. The lighted city streets spread out below us in a geometric checkerboard. We could see the endless columns of headlights moving away from the city on the Freeways—like an army of marching fireflies.

"Americans are gilt-edged fools," Maria said suddenly. "They'll lose this war, but there was a time once when they could have wiped out the Reds—when they had weapons the Russians couldn't match."

"Not fools, Maria; humanitarians. We put our faith in justice instead of brute force."

"Force is justice, Dr. Roswell. To win: that's the only thing that counts."

"And you believe they will?"

"The Communists have planned this for a long time; they've calculated all the risks. Tonight the strength is on their side, and they won't be afraid to use it."

"Only material power, Maria. There's something else—"

She laughed.

A blast of fire and flame shot up from the entrance through the harbor breakwater, followed rapidly by a dozen more explosions. Something—enemy submarines?—had triggered the mines protecting the harbor. Cold fear rose in my throat. Maria looked at her watch, and flung her arms around my neck.

"I'm frightened—terribly frightened," she whispered. I felt her lips warm on mine, her fingers tearing, like cat claws, at the back of my skull.

There were more explosions in the harbor. Debris fountained up from the navy installations. Enemy

submarines were there; that much was clear. A suicide squad had come first, exploding the mines; the rest were pouring through the gap.

I tried to pull Maria's hands away from my neck. I felt the pin-prick of the needle and I heard her say,

"We still have a use for you intellectuals, Dr. Roswell—for a while yet."

I wanted to push her from me. I wanted to fling myself out of the car. But my body went limp and a black nightmare closed over my mind. The last thing I saw was the Madonna smile on Maria's face, lit by the scarlet fire of the explosions in the harbor.

*IV. The Highway—Thursday,
11:00 P.M. Jerry Bonhill*

"JERRY! JERRY, your father's dead!" The shrill scream came from far away. I felt cold hands pulling at my shirt, dragging me back from the emptiness. Pain throbbed in my head. I opened my eyes.

I couldn't have been out for more than a minute. The planes were still diving at the highway, slashing bullets into the shambles. All the traffic had stopped, held up by the wreckage.

People were running from their cars and leaping into the ditch. A poor concealment, for the burning gasoline left no sheltering darkness. The planes came again, firing into the ditch. I could hear the cries of the dying and the wounded, above the jet-blast of the motors.

Mom helped me out of the car. With her handkerchief she dabbed at the cut on my forehead, where my head had struck the wind-

shield. When I heard the swelling roar of the planes a third time, I jerked Mom down on the earth. We rolled beneath the car. A bullet hit one of the windows and the fragmented glass clattered against the open door.

In five minutes it was over: that first taste of hell. Flights of planes came out of the east, with wing-mounted guns blasting at the enemy. The air battle joined high above us. We heard the angry clatter of machine guns and the roar of motors. Sometimes a plane fell, making a comet-trail of fire in the night sky.

Men were hauling the wreckage off the highway. I joined them. In ten minutes we had one lane clear. The refugee cars began to move again.

We were still clearing the highway when the Red Cross helicopters came, settling into the field beyond the grove. Army Medical Corpsmen lifted the seriously wounded into stretchers and loaded them in the waiting ships. One of the pilots told me the unit came from March Field. He gestured toward the air battle thundering overhead.

"They're our boys up there, what's left of them. They must have tangled with the whole, damn Red air force."

"What's happening?" I asked.
"This is one of the neatest sneak attacks on record." He fumbled in his jacket pocket for a cigarette. "First they fouled up the roads so we can't get any transports to go through, and then—"

"You mean the evacuation of L.A.? It was on the radio. I heard it myself."

"Half a dozen sympathizers could hold a station long enough to make the announcement. After-

ward they wrecked every transmitter in the city, so the C.D. couldn't broadcast a correction. That's the way we have it doped out."

"But the Russian planes—"

"A couple of hours after the highways were nicely jammed, Red subs broke through into the Los Angeles harbor. We don't know how many—none of our boys have got close enough to see—but it's a damn' big chunk of their fleet. The subs launched the fighter planes, and they're probably putting men ashore by this time. They've bought themselves a beachhead, unless we can move transports down these roads mighty quick."

"Don't we have any bases closer to the city?"

"The Soviets have given us the works—everything in one knock-out attack. Most of our fighter planes were shuttled north to intercept the big bombers. This L.A. landing has us where the hair is short. All we have at March Field are the cadets, still in flight school."

"And the navy?" I asked.

"Most of the Pacific Fleet is at Hawaii—that is, the ships the Red subs haven't sunk. The Reds will probably hold their beachhead for a while. But if they want to exploit it, they're going to need a hell of a lot of manpower. How will they get it here? Tonight they're throwing away their air force and a big piece of their submarine fleet. And don't forget: no Soviet city is going to survive our H-bombs. We aren't licked yet, kid; not by a long shot."

There were only four people still in the grove—Mom, a leather-faced old man, a girl of about my age, and a small boy of nine. And, of

course, the dead, laid out in rows under the trees.

The three people were strays Mom had taken under her wing. It was a habit of hers. The man said his name was Pat Thatcher. He had lost his car in the pile-up.

The child was Jim Riley. His parents had been killed in the strafing. We knew nothing about the girl. She sat motionless, in a state of shock. She had been like that when they pulled her out of the shambles. She wasn't beautiful, but she was well put together. Red hair cut short, like a boy's; blue eyes; a tiny, turned-up nose; and freckles on her cheeks.

I examined the car. Except for the broken windshield and side window, it seemed undamaged. But the wheels were bogged deep in the soft soil. With Pat Thatcher's help I dug out the back wheels and began to push the car toward solid ground.

Little Jim Riley and the red-headed girl squeezed in the back beside our cartons of canned food and the bundles of clothing.

Mom and Thatcher sat in front with me. I started the motor and put the car in gear. That was my first indication that we had anything wrong. The engine pounded as if it had a bad case of mechanical asthma; the front wheels shimmied on the highway.

"You'll have to fix it," Mom shouted.

"Nothing he can do," Thatcher replied.

The shimmy of the front wheels became steadily worse. After we started up the grade, it was impossible to push the car any faster than fifteen miles an hour. It was midnight before we reached the three-thousand-foot level.

I tried the car radio again. I

couldn't raise San Francisco, but I brought in the faint, fading signal of another station—probably Salt Lake City. The announcer was saying,

"... first rumor of a Soviet landing at Los Angeles, and the government spokesman declared the rumor was without foundation. In a second bulletin ..." Static for half a minute. The radio came up loud again, "... the bombing of Boston and Tacoma. There is as yet no reliable estimate of casualties in Detroit and Chicago; both cities were partially evacuated before the H-bombs fell. Our only news out of Europe is still three hours old. During the first twenty minutes of the war, Soviet planes dropped H-bombs on the major English cities; the British had insufficient time to carry out any effective evacuation of their larger centers of population. British heavy bombers made retaliatory raids on the continent, but we still have no confirmation . . ."

The voice was choked out by static. We couldn't bring in the station again; I snapped off the radio. Mom began to twist her hands together, frowning uncertainly.

"Jerry," she asked, "does that mean England's fighting on our side?"

"It's their war, too, Mom, just as much as it's ours."

"But Dr. Clapper always said they wouldn't—they wanted to knife us in the back. I'm—I'm actually glad Dr. Clapper was wrong for once." Her lips began to tremble; I saw tears on her cheeks. She added, wistfully, "I wish I could have made myself say that while Chris was still alive."

The car wheezed past the four-thousand-foot marker.

Suddenly a flash of white lit the northern sky, beyond the ridge of the mountain. Two or three seconds passed. Waves of concussion bent the tops of the pines, like a storm wind; a thunder of sound shook the earth. Jim Riley awoke and started to cry.

"The H-bomb!" Mom gasped. "No farther north than Santa Barbara," Thatcher added. "That's my guess."

Then we heard the roar of big bombers, growing louder and louder in the night sky. I saw them in the moonlight. Not one or two, but scores. They swept low over the city. Tiny figures dropped in rhythmic precision toward the earth. In a moment thousands of dark-colored parachutes ballooned in the air.

V. The City—Thursday, Midnight
Dr. Stewart Roswell

I RECOVERED slowly from the opiate Maria D'Orlez had given me. I saw her behind the wheel of my car. The dashlight reflected upward gave her face a saintly expression—the Madonna mask.

Slowly I pushed myself up on the seat beside her. I hadn't the strength to do anything else. My mind was in a stupor.

Maria turned south on the ocean front boulevard, high on the bluff above the beach. The moving panel of moonlight on the water passed across the submarines surfaced in the harbor. I saw the catapults launching the fighter planes, and the crowded landing barges moving toward the shore.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Roswell," Maria said suddenly, in a sultry voice.

"You help to betray your own country—" My voice was high-pitched, unrecognizable, the voice



of a stranger. "—and that's all you can say?"

"We need spokesmen, respectable men to explain our position to the American people."

"And you honestly believe you can force me to spread Communist propaganda?"

"Truth, Dr. Roswell. You and the others. You were my assignment tonight. I followed your car when you went downtown; that's how I met you at the hotel."

"But force, Maria—"

"Education." That one word was crisp and granite-hard. "When your mind is washed clean of all the bourgeois rubbish you've been taught to believe, you'll know how to speak for the people. It is a great awakening, Dr. Roswell, a wonderful awakening to a glorious, new world."

She brought my car to a stop in front of a large mansion on the

ocean front, one of the gaudiest, pseudo-Spanish cathedrals of Millionaire's Row. I was still too weak to stand alone; Maria had to help me up the brick walk.

I recognized the house. It belonged to Marvin Harlip Dragen III, the addle-witted fourth-generation heir of a nineteenth century robber baron who spent a good part of his life dabbling at matrimony. What time and energy he had left over he devoted to Causes. He was in the strangely inconsistent position of controlling an enormous fortune, while at the same time loudly condemning the means by which it had been acquired. He was the angel of American Communism.

"You've brought us another guest, Miss D'Orlez!" He beamed. "How delightful."

"Dr. Stewart Roswell," she said.



"The historian? We are pleased to have you join us, Comrade Roswell." Dragen rubbed his hands together. "It goes straight to the heart, doesn't it?—so many prominent men volunteering their help."

"Where's his room, Marvin?"

"Yes, a room—of course." Dragen took a list from his pocket and studied it carefully. He was a little, soft man. His round face rode above rolls of fat. His eyes were small, dark, agate beads set too close together in a wad of pink clay. His yellow hair was plastered back on his skull to hide the balding crown. The unreal coloring of his cheeks, the bright slash of his mouth, obviously cried his use of cosmetics. "We still have one empty room for Dr. Roswell—third floor, on the corner. Though I'm afraid we'll have to start doubling up when our other friends arrive."

Marvin rang a bell. Two strong-arm boys, armed with pistols, came from a side room and pushed me roughly toward the stairway. Still unsteady on my feet, I stumbled and fell. Grinning, one of the men kicked me viciously in the groin. I lay against the steps, paralyzed by the agony of pain.

Dragen waddled toward me, fluttering his pudgy hands. "I do hope you aren't hurt, Dr. Roswell. It was an accident; you understand that, naturally. These Comrades are really as gentle as doves. They save their anger for the enemies of the people."

Maria D'Orlez said, without feeling, "I'm sure Dr. Roswell doesn't want to be an enemy of the people."

"A bloated plutocrat," Dragen added.

"But he may require a little education . . ." Maria's voice trailed

away in a frightening silence.

The strong-arm boys laughed and jerked me to my feet. They dragged me up three flights of steps, pushed open a bedroom door and flung me into the room. I heard the key turn in the lock. I lay on the floor, aware of nothing but pain. I felt myself retching. I tried to crawl away. My hand touched the leg of a chair. Slowly I pulled myself up until I could rest against the chair. After a time the pain subsided.

The door key grated in the lock. I swung around, instinctively afraid. (Had I learned my first lesson, then, so soon?—to respond to every new stimulus with fear?) I expected Dragen's bully boys; but it was Maria D'Orlez. She slid into the room stealthily, pressing her finger on her lips.

She handed me a small glass containing a milky liquid. "I know what Dragen's men did. Drink this, Dr. Roswell. It will take away the pain."

I pushed the glass away. "Or drug me again."

"Don't say that. I can't stand that look of accusation in your eyes. I want to help you."

"Is that why you brought me here?"

"We must have you on our side, Dr. Roswell. We need men of your intelligence and ability."

"Possibly, when your goons finish what you call education—"

"But you don't have to go through that." She put the glass on the dresser and came closer to me. I smelled the gardenia scent of her hair and, even in the darkness, I saw her fragile, Madonna smile. "That's why I had to risk talking to you again. The others don't know I'm here. You must never tell them." She put her hand

unexpectedly on mine. "Or may I—may I call you Stewart?"

Her air of timid conspiracy was contrived. I knew how they operated: first the mailed fist, then soft words—any device that won their dialectic objective.

"Please, Stewart, forget your bitterness." Her tears were surprisingly real. "It's true I forced you to come here; that was my assignment. But I sincerely admire your books; the whole party does. In spirit you've always been one of us. We ask only peace and freedom for all humanity, an international democracy of good-will and brotherhood."

"Word games, Maria."

She drew away from me and her face became cold marble. "All right, Stewart. Let's forget that—junk your idealism—and talk about practical things. You want to save your own neck; every man does. When the Soviets win this war—"

"You seem sure of that, Maria. Why?"

"Because we put our bets on material reality, the logistics of weapons. We're not waiting for any vague spiritual nonsense to work a miracle for us. Tonight, Stewart, Soviet H-bombs will wipe out nearly every industrial city in the United States. Except one."

"You think the Russian cities are immune?"

She shrugged. "They're part of the gamble."

"And the people who die?"

"Martyrs in our great crusade for peace. We'll build them a fine memorial in the new Moscow." She gestured toward the harbor, where the explosions were becoming less frequent. "This is what counts, Stewart; this one industrial center which is going to survive. Four

hundred of the bombers in the second wave that crossed Canada tonight are carrying paratroops—not bombs. The issue is being settled here, Stewart. By midnight we'll have our beachhead in America: a harbor for our submarines, refineries to turn out fuel, heavy industry still undamaged. With Los Angeles as our base of operations, what problem will we have conquering a nation already in chaos from the bombing? America will surrender within a week."

Maria D'Orlez was no longer an enigma, but a tragic symbol of our failure to achieve our own ideals.

For myself, I knew the choice was very close. The strong-arm boys would be back to resume the farce they called education. Did I have the guts to hold to what I believed? Did I have the faith and the conviction of the Christian martyr?—for only that could overturn the empire of the Politburo.

VI. The Ridge—Friday morning, 12:30 A.M. Jerry Bonhill

JIM RILEY was still crying. Mom reached over the seat and tried to comfort him. I felt her body stiffen. "Jerry!" she gasped. "The girl . . ."

In the rearview mirror I saw the red-head kneeling on the seat and aiming my rifle at the planes overhead. She pulled the trigger again and again, while the hammer clicked against the empty chamber.

"Let her be," Pat Thatcher told us. "It may bring her out of the shock."

We were at the top of the hill, close to the mountain village of Running Springs. It was not a large village. Half a dozen stores, a tavern, and a tourist lodge. In the hills back of the highway were

a number of vacation cabins. I banged on the door of the general store, which was also the post office and service station. When I had no answer, I tried the other stores before I crossed the highway to the tavern. A note, hastily block-printed, fluttered from the door,

"Running Springs and Arrowhead evacuated. Inquire at Victorville."

I walked back to the car. The red-haired girl was crying softly. Her log-jam of emotion had been broken. I told Thatcher Running Springs had been evacuated. He got out and looked thoughtfully at the gasoline pump in front of the general store; then he broke the lock and pushed the hose nozzle into our tank.

Thatcher and I got back into the car. The girl was no longer crying. Mom still sat beside her, caressing her hand; Jim moved into the front seat, between Thatcher and me.

"I—I want to thank you," the girl said, "for taking care of me." She bit her lip to hold back her tears. "I'm Cheryl Fineberg. If we could get through to our house at Palm Springs, we would be able to stay there. We've plenty of food and—and—"

"Your father was the movie producer?" Thatcher asked.

"Yes. I saw him die. And mother—she threw herself in front of me. She was trying to say something. I saw her lips open. Then—then blood came from her mouth. And father slumped down and the car rammed into something." She clenched her fists over her eyes.

"Don't think about it," Mom said. "We all lost someone back there."

"I won't give in to it again," the girl promised.

I put the car in gear and we wobbled out of Running Springs, driving east toward Big Bear Lake.

"Jerry," Mom said. "I just happened to remember: Dr. Clapper has a mountain cabin somewhere near here—between Running Spring and Snow Valley."

Thatcher put in, "Clapper took off for the hills before noon; I picked up the rumor somewhere."

"Jerry, if we could find him," Mom proposed eagerly, "I'm sure he'd put us up for a while."

"I'd rather take a chance on the Commies," Thatcher answered.

Jim Riley spoke up, "I'm sure I smell smoke!"

So did I. Half a minute later, as we swung around a granite shelf towering over the road, we saw the wall of fire lapping at the pines a mile or so north of the highway.

"We can't go back," Thatcher snapped. "We'll have to outrun it."

"In this junk heap?" I asked.

I pushed the car faster than I should. Once or twice, on a sharp curve, the shimmying wheels almost sent us off the bank. Yet I didn't seem to be able to increase the safety margin between us and the fire. If anything, the smoke in the air was getting thicker. The billowing white blanket blotted out the moonlight. The haze and the darkness reduced our visibility to less than ten feet.

A big buck darted suddenly in front of us. I had no time to jam on the brakes. We hit him. The body jolted under the wheels. I heard the sharp snap of metal; the wheel spun in my hand; and the car lurched out of control into the embankment.

Thatcher leaped out and looked beneath the car. He straightened

slowly. "Well, that finishes the axle; we start walking now."

"What about our food?" Mom demanded. "And our clothes—"

"We'll take everything we can carry. Jerry, do you know where we are?"

"We just passed Snow Valley. It isn't much more than a mile to Lakeview Point, at the top of the grade."

"We may be all right on the other side. A firebreak runs along the ridge; if the wind's right, there's a good chance the fire won't cross it."

Mom and Cheryl Fineberg took the bundles of clothing, which were lighter. Thatcher and I carried the cartons of canned goods. Jim Riley insisted on doing his part, so we gave him the water thermos. I've handled a fifty-pound pack on camping trips and it never bothered me.

We made very slow progress. When we heard the crackling of the fire somewhere behind us, I was ready to drop the boxes and make a run for it. But Pat Thatcher trudged on without looking back and his courage influenced the rest of us.

The air sucked in by the heat dispersed the smoke. The moon was clear above us again. Looking back, I saw that the fire had not yet crossed the highway. Then, above the roar of flames, I heard the purr of a motor.

"Someone's coming!" Mom cried. "He'll pick us up and get us out of this."

Thatcher said doubtfully, "When it's every man for himself—"

We moved to the shoulder of the road as a blue Cadillac swung around the curve. In the red light of the fire, we all saw the driver clearly. A big man, as sleekly hand-

some as his car, dark-haired and bushy-browed: the somber face we had all seen so often on the TV screen.

"Dr. Clapper," Mom said, with a sigh of relief. "Thank God. He'll help us."

She stepped out on the road, waving her arms. It was obvious that Willie Clapper saw her. His face was suddenly torn with a terrible fear. He gunned the motor and almost ran Mom down as he swung past us. A hundred yards beyond, he stopped long enough to throw something out of the car. It burst into flame and the fire fed along the dry carpet of pine needles. We began to run, but long before we reached the spot the brush had caught and the fire was across the highway. Behind us the inferno broke out again and we were trapped in a closing ring of flame. The sound of Clapper's car receded in the distance.

Mom stood on the road, the flickering flame throwing distorted shadows on her face. "Dr. Clapper did that," she said. "He did it deliberately—Dr. Clapper!"

Thatcher said, "When a man panics—"

"But he wasn't frightened until he saw us!"

Thatcher motioned toward a bluff of bare gravel rising beyond the highway. "We might still pull through if we get under there. Nothing within fifty feet of it will burn."

We dropped our cartons and slid down the embankment. We had to cross a deep gully. A tiny stream trickled over the rocks. The water was hot, coated with a scum of carbon particles.

It was the gully that saved us. We were still at the bottom, sheltered by a block of granite eight

feet high, when the sky above the fire blazed white.

"They've dropped an H-bomb on the desert."

I heard Thatcher say that in the split-second before the chaos tore loose around us. The earth shook. The bare bluff where we had meant to take refuge came apart and the ground lashed toward us like a wave of muddy water. Instinctively we fell flat in the stream, sheltered by the pile of granite. I felt the water flowing hot against my chest. I heard Mom scream.

The hurricane of loose earth lashed over us. I felt tiny stones cut across my back. A tree fell over the gully, hung there for a moment, and was whipped away again.

Suddenly it was over.

None of us was seriously hurt, although in places our skin had been rubbed raw by the abrasive force of flying soil. I stood up. The air was filled with fine dust. The bluff of bare earth was gone.

But the blast of flying gravel had turned the front of the fire. The road to the crest was open.

VII. The City, Friday, 1:30 A.M. Dr. Stewart Roswell

AN HOUR or more after Maria D'Orlez left my room the door was thrown open again. Marvin Dragen III stood on the threshhold, kneading his fat hands together. His two strong-arm boys flung a stranger on the floor. The man—slightly built, graying, wearing a dark business suit—was unconscious, his face badly beaten, his white shirt spotted with blood.

"I'm afraid I must impose on you, Dr. Roswell," Dragen smirked, licking his painted lips. "We have so many guests. I'll have to

ask you to share your room. You and Comrade Knight—" He indicated the unconscious man. "—will enjoy having a little chat."

When they were gone, I lifted Knight into the chair. With my handkerchief I wiped the blood away from his lips. Still unconscious, he muttered in a hoarse, almost incomprehensible whisper, "Turn the other cheek . . . the other cheek . . ." His name sounded familiar, and I might have recognized him if his face had not been distorted by welts and bruises.

At last he opened his eyes. For a split-second I saw fear; then, a quiet composure. "Dr. Roswell!" His voice was low-pitched and gentle, with a faint undertone of a New England accent. "I didn't know you were one of them."

"I'm a prisoner just as you are."

The grimace behind the bruises was meant to be a smile. "They expected me to demonstrate how to turn the other cheek. I'm a Quaker, you see. Religious pacifism seems to be particularly obnoxious to them."

George Knight, the Quaker: I knew him then. I had met him once or twice at educational meetings. He had been a banker and later a college president; five years ago he resigned in order to give his full time to the work of the American Friends Service Committee.

"They sent a young man to bring me in," George Knight said. "A university student. He had visited the Service Committee once or they want us to do."

"It still isn't clear to me what they want us to do."

"They aren't sure themselves. They're waiting for a boss of some sort who's on his way from Moscow to direct the occupation. The

general idea is to use us in propaganda broadcasts. My young man showed me the list of names of the men they have imprisoned here tonight. Twenty-five of us, handpicked by Moscow; we each have an unusual prominence with special groups."

George Knight went on to name them all. I recognized the names; a few of the men I knew personally. Writers, lecturers, priests, a financier, two industrialists whose farsighted labor policies had set a pattern for business, a judge, a newspaper editor, a Senator.

"All twenty-five of us have one thing in common," I told Knight. "We've been Willie Clapper's whipping boys."

"I hadn't thought of that. Actually, it was his telecasts that gave us the notoriety we have."

"And built up the special groups that give such weight to our opinions," I added. "An interesting coincidence."

"You aren't seriously suggesting—but that's preposterous!"

"Is it? Clapper took each of us out of relative obscurity and made our names familiar to a national audience. And we all live in the Los Angeles area, where they could round us up quickly. Why didn't Clapper dig out any pseudosubversives anywhere else in the country?"

"But he must have—"

"Name one. In fact, Knight, name anyone Clapper attacked who isn't here tonight."

"Your argument can't hold water. Willard Clapper's accusations will nullify anything we broadcast. That wouldn't make sense, if he had been part of their conspiracy."

"The Reds can work around that—if they have Clapper here, too."

"I saw the list. His name wasn't there."

"He could come in of his own accord."

Far away I heard the sound of an automobile motor. It seemed ominous; the city had been quiet too long. I walked to the window. I saw the open car racing down the boulevard. With screaming brakes it stopped in front of the Dragen mansion. The driver sprang out and saluted, while a tall, uniformed man marched smartly up the walk, followed by four Soviet soldiers armed with submachine guns.

"I think the Moscow brass has arrived," I said to Knight. He looked at me, with a strangely intent light blazing in his eyes. Very quietly he answered,

"It will be Gordov."

"Who's Gordov?"

"A Soviet general—also one of the top men in the secret police."

"The university student told you? But what difference it makes—"

"A great deal. No one told me who was coming; I don't think they knew. You could say this answers a prayer of mine. If you prefer a more prosaic explanation, say I'm risking a guess on a good probability. Alex Gordov is one of the half-dozen men the Politburo was likely to consider for this job."

"You know Gordov, Knight?"

"I did, long ago. I've watched him climb to the top, over the wrecked careers—and sometimes the broken bodies—of his friends. He learned how to develop those traits so essential to the successful Soviet Man. When I met him, at a hospital in Leningrad, he was a youngster of sixteen—talented, a brilliant mind, far too sensitive for the Soviet pattern. He was a lieu-

tenant in the infantry—at sixteen, badly wounded during the last days of the war. Our penicillin saved his arm from amputation. Gordov was very much aware of that, and it disturbed him a great deal because it didn't jibe with the American stereotype he had been taught. At the whim of some party functionary, Alex had been ordered to study English while he was in the hospital. He talked to me whenever he could—theroetically to improve his skill with the language—actually, because he was trying to find out what made me tick."

"It must have taken a weird twist of dialectic," I suggested, "for him to fit a Quaker into their version of our society."

"Alex had the intelligence to see reality beyond the fancy double-talk of their party propaganda. He knew aggression for what it was, whether they called it peace or liberation. And he had an amazing capacity for love—in the abstract, Dr. Roswell: love for his fellow man—always anathema to the party. It was that, ultimately, which broke him to the Soviet machine. They did it quite simply. The usual technique: they had a use for Gordov, and they took him over in much the same way they did us tonight.

"His mother and sister had been arrested as enemies of the people. The secret police arranged for Alex to discover the name of the agent who was responsible. They allowed Gordov to take his revenge. Then he was arrested. The police showed him their file—enough evidence to condemn him to the firing squad. They made the usual offer. Gordov would go free if he agreed to work for them. They threw in freedom for his mother and sister as an added incentive.

"Alex learned his lesson and he learned it well. Since then he has climbed high, using the same methods of treachery and betrayal. But locked somewhere in his soul, Dr. Roswell, is the boy I knew—his capacity for love; his clear-eyed vision of the truth. I'm counting on that tonight."

"But what do you expect to do? What possible influence—"

"I shall be myself—the man Gordov remembers. I know it won't be easy. Alex may have to destroy me; as a matter of fact, I believe he will have no other choice. But, whatever happens, it will awaken the memory of the boy in his soul, it will arouse an inner conflict of mind that only—"

Just then Dragen waddled into the room, followed by his two armed guards.

"Comrades, I have exciting news," he said. "The Comrade General from Moscow is eager to meet my guests. If you would be kind enough to come along with me—" He paused, frowning and fingering his lower lip. "But we do want to make a good impression, now, don't we? The Comrade General mustn't think we have bourgeois notions of class superiority."

He moved toward Knight and ripped off the Quaker's tie. When Knight moved back involuntarily, the guards snapped out their guns. "I expect your complete co-operation," Dragen remarked petulantly. "Stand at attention, please, Comrade Knight."

Knight and I were pushed into the hall. They took us downstairs into the living room.

Four Soviet soldiers, armed with submachine guns, lounged against an ornate table. Dragen and his two guards left the room

again. One by one they assembled their twenty-five prisoners.

Dragen was reciting the familiar Communist clichés when the Soviet General entered from the hall. He was a tall, powerful, swarthy man; brooding intelligence—the crafty wit of expediency—flashed from his eyes, but his face was an impassive mask. A single medal swung from his tunic, the Order of Lenin. He had a bottle of vodka in his hand and from time to time he drank from it liberally.

And this, I thought, was Alex Gordov? This was the man George Knight hoped to move by the simple sincerity of his Quaker faith?

The General paused at the door, speaking crisply in good English almost without an accent to someone beyond my line of vision. "It's up to you to locate him," the General said. "Get him here; we don't accept excuses. At noon, I want to put this circus of intellectuals on the air."

Dragen had broken off his tirade when he saw the General. He made an ingratiating gesture and spoke to us in a fawning whisper. "Comrades, may I present your commanding officer—General Anton Zergoff."

I risked a glance in Knight's direction. I saw that his face had gone white; his lips were moving silently.

Zergoff took a pull at his bottle. He walked slowly along the line-up of prisoners. "I'm afraid I disappoint you—one of you, at least," he announced in a hoarse, parade-ground bark. "Let me set your minds at ease immediately. General Gordov has been—" A slight pause for effect. "—taken care of. He expressed a reluctance to command the occupation when he saw the list of intellectuals we



*Cheryl
Fineberg*

planned to recruit. Before his execution, General Gordov was persuaded to make a full confession. He has been an enemy of the people for years—since he was sixteen. One man was responsible, one of you—one man who had the power to reach into the highest ranks of the people's government and force a Soviet General to betray the revolution."

Anton Zergoff turned to face us, his feet spread wide, his face savage with rage. "Now it is my privilege to meet this pig—this stinking agent of capitalism; I shall personally supervise his re-education. Where is the Quaker who calls himself George Knight?"

Unhesitatingly Knight moved out of the rank of prisoners. There was a gentle smile on his battered face. He said softly, but in a voice we all could hear,

"So Alex remembered. God works His will in strange ways."

VIII. The Ridge—Friday, midnight until dawn. Jerry Bonhill

I HAD an uneasy feeling that Thatcher wasn't simply the ordinary old man he pretended. He spoke too well, for one thing; he put his ideas in words that would not occur to the average man. He had volunteered no information about himself. I didn't know how he had come to meet Mom in the orange grove, or why she felt he needed her help. If anyone were obviously capable of taking care of himself, that was Pat Thatcher. Perhaps the shoe was on the other foot. Maybe Thatcher attached himself to us because he knew we needed him.

Miles ahead of us, glittering like a fragment of glass lost in a pool of darkness, I could see Big Bear

Lake, at the heart of a broad valley thickly grown with pines.

A highway turnout had been made at Lakeview Point. Hidden in the shadow we saw Willie Clapper's blue Cadillac, lying on its side precariously close to the edge. It had been overturned by the blast. Flying debris and soil particles had scoured off the paint on one side of the car.

Thatcher and I put down our cartons and moved toward the Cadillac cautiously. Thatcher pushed a shell into my rifle and carried it across his shoulder. We bellowed Clapper's name but got no reply. I climbed the frame and tried to pull open the door. It was locked and the car was empty.

Thatcher scratched his head with the barrel of the rifle.

"If Clapper's gone, he must have locked the car from the outside." There was a sudden sound in the trees above the turnout. Thatcher whirled, snapping the rifle to his shoulder. The noise wasn't repeated and warily he lowered the gun. It had been nothing.

Thatcher looked at the car again. "The way I figure it, Willie Clapper drove past us like a bat out of hell. Then he parked the car up here, got out and locked it up just before the bomb went off. It would have been suicide if he had been farther down the highway—no protection there at all. But if that's the way it stacks up, Clapper knew the bomb was going off—and he knew approximately when."

"How could he? That doesn't make sense. And where's Clapper now?"

"That's an interesting question, Jerry. Gone with the big wind—maybe. Your first one's easier; he was working with the Reds."

"Willie Clapper? Now I've heard everything."

We returned to the highway and picked up our cartons.

We made another quarter mile before Mom gave out. She dropped on the shoulder of the road, not quite unconscious but close to it. We improvised a camp close by in a small clearing sheltered by a V-shaped wall of rock.

Thatcher took the first watch. I knew I couldn't keep awake. My mind was in a daze, where nothing mattered very much. I had a nagging mistrust of Thatcher—an uneasy feeling . . .

When Pat Thatcher shook me awake I felt as if I hadn't slept at all, yet I saw dawn in the eastern sky.

"We said we'd change off every few minutes, Pat!" It seemed entirely natural to use his first name. The suspicion I felt suddenly struck me as absurd.

"You looked as if you could use the rest, Jerry," Pat replied. "I found a spring about a hundred yards down the road. Go stick your head in it. The water's cold as hell, but it'll do you good."

At least it washed the cotton out of my head. When I walked back to the camp the chilly morning wind felt pleasantly cozy. Thatcher threw me the rifle and lay down on the pine bed beside Jim Riley. I crossed the road and sat on a boulder, watching the sunrise over the valley.

I thought of the people who had been trapped under the bomb. How many had died?—half a million; twice that?

I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned. Cheryl Fineberg stood beside me, holding out her sweater.

"You looked so cold out here,

Jerry. Don't you want to put this on?"

I grinned and pushed my arms into the sleeves. Cheryl was a nice little thing to have around. It was the first time I saw her simply as a girl.

Unfortunately Cheryl's sweater was too small. It pulled painfully against the abrasive burns on my back. I took it off again.

"Maybe I ought to start getting used to a few discomforts," I apologized.

"We all should, I guess." She folded the sweater carefully. "I'll put this aside. Your mother might really have to have it if—well, later on . . ."

Yes, later on: if we were still refugees in the mountains when winter came. So that possibility had occurred to Cheryl, too. She wasn't the kind of girl who tried to avoid an unpleasant fact by pretending it wasn't there.

"The morning is so beautiful, Jerry. It's hard to believe the nightmare last night was real."

"We were lucky. If we had gone on to the desert as we were supposed to—"

As I glanced in Cheryl's direction I saw, far up the road, a man walking toward us. I stood up, slipping my finger through the rifle guard. The sun rose over the ridge and in the slanting shaft of light on the highway I recognized Willie Clapper. He raised his hands high.

"Don't shoot!" he cried. "I'm a friend. I'm not armed." His voice was ragged with fear.

I motioned for him to join us. He ran forward eagerly. "My cabin was burned. I have no food. If you could spare me a little something to eat—" His wheedling trailed off hopefully.

"We met last night, Dr. Clapper," I said, "on the road. Perhaps you remember—"

"I was scared. I couldn't think straight."

"You deliberately started a second fire and tried to kill us."

"I thought you were— Well, the Reds would send subversives out to get me; I've fought the good fight so long."

From Willie Clapper's point of view, that nonsense was probably logical. "All right," I agreed. "You can eat with us."

Thatcher made no attempt to hide his anger when he saw Clapper; if the decision had been up to Pat, Clapper would have starved.

I thought Mom would be pleased to find herself so close to her idol. Instead, she was cold and aloof, remembering that Clapper had nearly run her down the night before.

I had made our fire at the back of the clearing. Sheltered by the rocks, we could not be seen from the road, nor were we able to see more than a twenty-foot segment of the highway. The Soviet paratrooper stumbled on us totally unprepared. We heard the indrawn breath from the mouth of the clearing.

For a second no one moved. We sat staring dumbly at the enemy; he stared back at us. His uniform was torn and smeared. His face seemed unusually red, as if he had stayed too long in the summer sun. He was carrying a submachine gun; he raised it slowly.

Willie Clapper sprang up. "Not me!" he yelped. "You know who I am. These others—"

Thatcher slammed his elbow into Clapper's stomach, and the politician dropped, groaning. Simul-

taneously Mom screamed and snatched my rifle, firing blindly.

The Soviet soldier toppled toward us. His gun clattered from his fingers. Cheryl caught it and bent over the man. "He's still alive," she said. "Your shot went wild, Mrs. Bonhill. I think he was hurt in the fire."

Cheryl looked at the submachine gun. She ran her fingers over the firing stud. "This may be the man who killed my father; he may be the man who dropped the bomb on the desert."

IX. The City—Friday morning, 2:30 A.M. Dr. Stewart Roswell

TWENTY-FOUR of us stood rigid against the cloister arches while General Anton Zergoff walked toward George Knight. Raw, heavy-muscled, animal power, a Goliath armed with whip and revolver and the absolute authority of the military conqueror—facing a slight, unimposing, beaten man, armed only with the intangible strength of conviction.

"The Quaker Pacifist," Zergoff purred. "The coward afraid to fight."

He lashed the back of his hand against Knight's jaw. The Quaker reeled, blood trickling from the freshly opened wounds in his lip. The General bent close to the smaller man's face.

"This is the idiot who betrayed Alexander Gordov. In a people's democracy, Comrade Knight, we are realists. I consider it my responsibility to educate you in the fundamental psychology of human nature." Zergoff swung his hand again; Knight staggered and I saw his eyes glaze with pain. "Every man will fight, Comrade Knight—every man, when it means his own

survival. It shall be my pleasure to smash this bourgeois idealism of yours. And when you are broken, Comrade, you will work with us or face the firing squad—however the whim happens to strike me."

George Knight lifted his hand quietly. In a quiet, almost compassionate voice, he said, "And now, General, like your misguided friend—" He gestured toward Dragen—"now you will quote Christ's words and order me to turn the other cheek. The due of Caesar."

Zergoff stood for a moment clenching his fists. Then, slowly, he began to smile. "No, Comrade, I expect to apply a somewhat more realistic psychology."

He jerked a revolver from his belt, emptying it except for one shell. He put the weapon on the table, motioning the Soviet soldiers back against the wall. Watching Knight's face, he beckoned one of Dragen's bully boys, disarmed the man and handed him a riding crop. He pushed Knight close to the table, where he stood two feet from the loaded revolver.

"A lesson, Comrade," Zergoff said, "in human nature. You should find the experiment illuminating. Comrade Bergoll, here, has always been obedient to party discipline. I am ordering him, under no condition, to touch the revolver. That weapon is for you to use; your only way to save yourself, incidentally. Comrade Bergoll will beat you with the crop until you break down and defend yourself. The gun's there, by your hand. Who knows? You might even reach it in time."

General Zergoff moved back with the Soviet soldiers. He gulped a stiff drink from the vodka bottle, then he signaled with a gesture,

and the beating began. I felt a sick nausea. Somewhere among the prisoners I heard a man vomiting; Zergoff bellowed with laughter. "The party develops strong bellies," he said; "if you survive."

And all the while I heard the steady slash of the crop upon human flesh. Knight neither cried out nor resisted. The silence lengthened; it endured for an eternity.

Sudden fury distorted Zergoff's face and he ordered the torment to stop.

George Knight still stood beside the revolver, bleeding and almost unconscious. I thought he smiled; it was difficult to identify an expression in the pulp of his face.

"Is it possible, General," he asked, "that your psychology of human nature needs revision?"

"You won't destroy me the way you did Gordov!"

"General, before your experiment began, you admitted failure."

"I have not failed! On your knees you will confess—"

"If I believed in violence, when you left the gun on the table I would have used it against you, General. You knew I wouldn't. You knew you were safe."

General Zergoff hurled an unopened bottle at Knight. It struck Knight's head, and the Quaker collapsed on the floor. The bottle shattered against the wall. His face white, Zergoff moved toward Knight. With the toe of his boot he turned the Quaker on his back.

"Not dead," he grunted, with what seemed to me a tone of satisfaction. He snapped his fingers at his men. They propped Knight into a chair and tried to revive him.

Zergoff faced us, pacing up and down while he talked; slowly he regained confidence.

"You have seen a demonstration of our methods of education. The lesson should be clear to you all."

Was he so accustomed to success, to the Communist formula of fear, that he didn't know what he was saying? The lesson was there: we had watched the conqueror admit defeat. Knight had given each of us the will to resist in our own way, armed with our individual beliefs. Anton Zergoff had missed the point.

"We have a use for each of you," the General went on. "You can serve us painlessly or after indoctrination. The choice is yours.

"Los Angeles is our key to victory. Beginning at dawn we shall funnel manpower into this area—according to the present plan, approximately five thousand men an hour. We have transformed the war into an infantry conflict; with all of Europe, Asia and Africa to draw from, we hold the overwhelming superiority in manpower. On both sides the atomic weapon is finished. Production capacity has been destroyed. Your air force as well as ours has been reduced to a negligible factor. True, your navy is still intact. But we have submarines in the Los Angeles harbor to hold off any direct naval attack.

"I am telling you this—the full, strategic picture—so you will understand that our victory is inevitable. We ask your help in order to bring the day of peace closer and spare your people the futile sacrifice of a long infantry war.

"We will go on the air at noon, on a twenty-four hour basis. We expect each of you to speak for us to your fellow citizens. Nothing really different from what you have already said or written, nothing different from what you be-

lieve yourselves. Can you honestly call that propaganda? Can you still say we are not sincerely humanitarian, not—"

An officer came to the door. Zergoff turned toward him. "Well?" he snapped.

"He has left the city, Comrade General."

"The fool! The heart of a rabbit. Have you traced him?"

"It is probable that he went to some sort of a vacation house—"

"Find it."

The officer saluted and turned away. As Zergoff swung toward us again, he saw that George Knight had regained consciousness. The General took the revolver from the table and ambled toward Knight's chair, smiling with smug self-confidence.

"Possibly, Comrade Knight, my original approach to your re-education was wrong. Here is the weapon I gave you before, still loaded with the one shell you refused to use to defend yourself. Take it, Comrade."

Knight did not move. Zergoff shrugged and balanced the revolver on the arm of the Quaker's chair. "You would not fight for yourself—but of course you would defend a helpless man. Typical middle-class nobility. Surely, Comrade, you would sacrifice your soul to save another man?"

"If it were the will of God."

Zergoff selected a prisoner at random. He ordered Bergoll to lash this new victim with the riding crop.

"Take the gun, Comrade. If you fire at Bergoll, the beating will stop."

Knight held his hands folded in his lap. The prisoner cried out in agony; blood spilled from his lacerated face. In Knight's eyes I

saw a surge of pity, as if he felt the pain himself.

"Here is an innocent man." Zergoff bent toward the Quaker, no longer smiling and no longer confident. "A persecuted man. You can save him—at the sacrifice of a principle. You lose nothing real. No property; no money. It costs you nothing, Pacifist!"

"Nor would I save him."

Zergoff clenched his fists. Slowly the color drained from his face. "Comrade if you will fire the gun—simply fire it, Comrade!—I will give you your freedom. You can leave this house and go where you please. You have my promise as a Soviet General."

"And all I hear is the voice of a Soviet General—not the inner voice of God."

The prisoner fell and Zergoff, quivering with anger, waved Bergoll aside. He snapped one of his men to attention and took his sub-machine gun. Grinning again he carried the gun to Knight and laid it gently in his lap.

"Now, Comrade, fire," he whispered. "You can kill us all; you can destroy the high command of the invasion."

George Knight did not touch the gun. He glanced up at Zergoff and he said gently, "You know this experiment is safe, too, General. I will not use the gun."

Zergoff leaped at him, hammering Knight's face with his fists. When the General's fury subsided, the Quaker was unconscious again. Zergoff said drunkenly, "Send them back to their rooms. Dragen, get me a bottle."

I carried George Knight up the three flights of carpeted steps. As I lowered him into the chair, his eyes fluttered open. In a whisper

he said, "Thank God I—I had the strength to go through with it."

He lapsed into unconsciousness. I stood looking at him, and I knew I saw a miracle.

2. The First Two Days

I. The Highway—Friday, 9:00 A.M. Boris Yorovich

I SAW the red-headed girl first, looking down at me. Her face was hard, but the expression was something new to her. It didn't fit her well. Behind the grimness I saw a sensitive, clear-eyed innocence, like the farm girls on our party posters. She had my sub-machine gun in her hand; it was aimed steadily at my heart.

"You're going to kill me?" I asked.

"Not yet."

Americans were soft-hearted fools, the commissars had always told us. The tension in my muscles relaxed. If I rolled against her legs, I could knock her down and take the gun from her. I tentatively tried to move my legs and I felt the numb pain again. I wasn't sure I could walk. That damned fire! . . .

"I'm surprised you speak English," the girl said. "That will make it easier—what we have to do."

"We were ordered to learn your language for the invasion."

I turned my head and I saw the others. An elderly couple, a dark-haired man with a politician's slick face, a child, and a boy about the girl's age—a big, half-naked, giant, who looked like a Finn or a Swede. He might be the red-head's husband, but I didn't think they married so early in America.

"You have a name," the girl said.

"Boris Yorovich, Lieutenant, Soviet Paratroops." That much we were permitted to tell them.

"I'm Cheryl Fineberg." She told me the names of the others, and I was baffled. I thought this was a family unit—the Americans cling together with typical middle-class loyalty, the commissars had said—but only the blond giant and the old woman had the same family name.

The girl tossed my gun to the old man and bent over me, ripping the torn uniform away from my leg. The hot pain was like fire when she touched my skin.

"It's a nasty cut," she said, "and you're badly burned." She opened a small, canvas bag and stood tiny bottles and tubes of medicine on the ground until she found the drug she wanted. "This should kill the infection, Lieutenant Yorovich. Afterward, we'll put a salve on those burns. How did you get hurt?"

"Our transport was shot down. We tried to use our chutes, but we were caught on the wing. I was lucky. Just before the crash, I got free. A tree broke my fall. It scratched me up a little, but that's all."

"And the others?" She sprinkled a sulfa powder over my wound.

I was tempted to lie to her—perhaps that's our natural approach to every situation—but it might have made her less willing to help me. "The fuel tank caught fire," I explained. "They were burned to death. It was a close call for me, too. Before I got out of that tree, the forest around me was burning. It was hot as hell."

"It was hot, I'm sure, Lieutenant," she agreed, "but not as hot

as the H-bombs you dropped on our cities." Her innocence, then, had teeth to it. Maybe this wouldn't be the pushover I expected.

Why had they kept me alive? Why had she tended my wounds? We were enemies. The Americans must have hated us. I felt no hatred for them, of course; pity, perhaps, that a system so attractive had to be destroyed because it was too weak to defend itself.

I count myself a sophisticate—or, rather, I did then. I was nineteen; I had been a university student for more than a year. I knew the difference between truth and party double-talk, but I also knew what I had to do to survive.

The girl motioned to the half-naked blond, whose name was Jerry Bonhill. He put his hands beneath my shoulders and lifted me to my feet. I staggered back against the rocky wall rising above the clearing.

Each of the others spoke to me, except the handsome politician, Dr. Willard Clapper. He mentioned his Cadillac. It was an issue they had been talking about before I stumbled into the clearing. I leaned against the granite, listening. I gathered that the politician's automobile had overturned. He wanted their help to right it so he could escape. No mention of them; just his own, personal survival. A good party man: yes, that man I understood.

Still it didn't add up right. This Clapper was the type who knew the angles and the risks. He must have known he was safer right here than anywhere else. The leather-faced old man—Pat Thatcher—put an end to the talk by saying flatly,



"We have another use for your car, Clapper."

"It is my duty as an American—a loyal American, I may add—to offer my services to the government."

"We'll be better off at Big Bear; so we'll use your car to get there."

"Time is of the essence, Thatcher! Under the best of conditions it's a three-hour drive to Los Angeles—"

"And just what do you have to do there?"

"I used that—I used it only as a comparative distance." The politician's voice shot up into the high registers as the old man clutched his coat and lifted him two inches off the ground.

"Let me have the key, Clapper."

Dr. Clapper fumbled in his coat pocket and handed over a key ring. I began to envy the way they handled their politicians in America. Maybe if we had done the same thing long ago, we could have called our souls our own now.

Thatcher and Jerry Bonhill went up the road toward the ridge. Clapper followed after them, bleating about loyalty and property rights. When they were gone, Bonhill's mother brought me some food in partly empty tins. Cheryl Fineberg stood thirty feet away, holding my machine gun and looking for all the world like a partisan guerilla on a party war poster.

I emptied the tins. Jim Riley, the child, asked me if I wanted something else. I said I did. He rummaged through the cartons of food, reading off the labels to me.

"Spaghetti and meat balls." I stopped him there. "That sounds fine, kid."

I took a meat ball out of the can and offered it to the boy. He stuffed

it into his cheek, like a squirrel with a nut.

"You know, you aren't such a bad guy," he decided.

The Cadillac came down the highway; it was painted blue on one side, while the bare metal was exposed on the other. Pat Thatcher was driving. Bonhill and Clapper sat beside him, and the politician was still whining about his rights.

"Of course it's my fault," Clapper admitted. "I didn't stop to fill the tank on my way up here. But that isn't the question. If we drive to Big Bear, I won't have enough gas left to—"

"It looks as if you aren't going anywhere, Dr. Clapper," Jerry said mildly.

"You have no legal right to interfere. This car is mine!"

"And we're using it."

These Americans were inexplicable. Without hesitation, they were applying something very close to Communism in seizing the politician's Cadillac. Maybe the Politburo psychologists were all wrong. Maybe the Americans valued the human being even above personal possessions. If so, that was a major error in our calculations. In a sense, it gave them a secret weapon that could win the war—if they knew how to exploit it properly.

We packed the canned goods in the trunk of the car. After a brief hesitation, Cheryl Fineberg shoved the submachine gun as well as Bonhill's rifle into the compartment and slammed down the lid. The two women, the boy and I sat in back. Thatcher was forced to drive very slowly along the winding road.

Jim Riley piped up, "We can't let them see the Lieutenant, not in

his uniform. I don't think they'd understand that he's O.K."

"So you've made up your mind about him?" the girl asked.

"Yes," I laughed, "because I eat spaghetti for breakfast."

"Maybe that isn't such a bad standard of judgment, until we come up with something better," she answered seriously. "But Jim is right. Let's get rid of your coat, Lieutenant. And your rank along with it. From now on in you're simply Boris Yorovich, a friend we picked up on the road."

I slid off my coat, inching the scorched cloth over my blistered hands. She decided my woolen undershirt had to go, too. The military dye and the shoddy workmanship were a dead giveaway. Stripped naked to the waist, I made a poor contrast to the blond giant in the front seat. The red-head eyed me abstractly.

"We'll have to get you out in the sun, Boris. If you're typical, maybe what you Russians really need is a good, two-week vacation in the mountains—instead of another piece of someone else's territory."

With all our endless manpower, with all our planes and bombs, we had one small chance of victory—and only one. I saw that with a terrible clarity. If Willard Clapper were the average American, they would surrender in a week. But if Cheryl Fineberg and Jim Riley and Jerry Bonhill were the enemy—

Cheryl decided that my trousers, charred, dirty and torn, would be unidentifiable, but my boots had to go. She rolled the discards into a bundle and threw them from the open window. Dr. Clapper glanced at me across the front seat; his eyes glowed furiously.

"You know what you've done, Lieutenant Yorovich," he said. "The deliberate removal of a uniform is desertion. On the other hand, if you fall into the hands of responsible Americans—loyal Americans—you will be considered a spy. It isn't a happy situation, is it? As a human being, I wish I could help you."

As Clapper turned his head toward the front again, Mrs. Bonhill gave a little scream. "Stop, Mr. Thatcher! There's a man lying in the road."

Thatcher jammed on the brakes. The man moved, pushing himself up on his elbows. His face and arms were burned. The skin hung loose in flapping, tattered tendrils.

"A refugee from the desert," Jerry said.

"Burned by radiation!" Cheryl gasped. "We'll have to help him. Perhaps in the village we can find some drugs to—"

"You won't put him in my car!" Clapper yelped. "He might be radioactive."

With a gesture of disgust, Thatcher opened the door and got out. Jerry Bonhill and Cheryl followed him.

Clapper moved to release the brake, so the car would roll down on the man and solve the problem for him. I reached across the seat and cracked my fist into the politician's jaw—three times, before the body went limp.

I felt exultant, as if I were mildly intoxicated. The feeling was very pleasant.

I got out and limped toward the others, to help them carry the groaning Negro to the car.

In that moment my choice was made. Not Clapper, but Cheryl and Bonhill were the spirit of America—the America we would never de-

stroy. I could no longer bury inside my mind the whisper from my childhood; I no longer had a desire to do so.

II. The City—Friday

Dr. Stewart Roswell

IN SPITE of General Zergoff's determination to put what he called our intellectual circus on the air at noon, the broadcast was postponed. Zergoff had a logical rationalization, as the Soviet Man must; the confusion in the United States on the first day of conquest was too widespread for the propaganda to be effective. His real reason was something a Russian General doesn't report to the Politburo: the spiritual challenge of George Knight, Quaker.

Twice during the night guards carried Knight out of our third-floor prison for long sessions of Communist re-education. When they brought him back the second time, shortly after dawn on Friday, the Quaker was close to death. Zergoff sent doctors to patch up the wounds. It wouldn't do for Knight to die—not until he admitted defeat.

Later Knight and I were both transferred to the first floor. We were still prisoners, but now we had the silk glove treatment in place of the mailed fist. George Knight, carefully bandaged and reeking of antiseptic, was laid on a leather couch and wrapped in blankets. Maria D'Orlez brought us a splendid breakfast—the only meal, incidentally, which we had that day.

Knight was still unconscious, but started to wake up after she left.

"During my educational indoctrination," Knight said when he had eaten a bit, "I did a great deal

of meditating, Stewart. The world has been thrown into a disastrous war; the destruction is beyond any horror we can imagine; and the worst misery and torment for the homeless millions is still to come. Yet, in spite of all that, we have an opportunity to create something good out of this catastrophe. There will be no victor; there never is in war. But there can be an enormous victory of ideals—to put it in words that mean more to me: a spiritual victory. The fighting will one day end; it must. And a shattered world will have to be remade. Before we dream of cities and parks rising over the bomb craters, we must think—this time—about man himself. We must build a believing world. Belief is a fundamental need of us all."

"Belief in what, Knight? Belief is an abstract. Civilizations before ours have gone berserk in the name of belief."

"Let's say, to start with, belief in man—in the dignity of the human soul. Build on that—it's what I mean by a believing world—and the isms lose all significance."

He had made his point so unexpectedly it exploded in my mind like a physical blow. "This mutual respect of each man for the other," I said. "By its very nature, it would wipe out Communism."

Knight shrugged his shoulders slightly. "Then, I'm afraid Zergoff believes in a false god. I'm truly sorry for him, Stewart. I say that in complete sincerity. It isn't easy for any man to have the fundamental nature of his being torn apart—even when it's built upon falsehood."

"And they call you Quakers Pacifists!"

"We take arms against no man, Stewart. But we believe all men—

including ourselves—have the right to seek the inner voice of God in their own individual ways. I will die for that belief just as readily as Zergoff would die on the battlefield. The General can't recognize the conflict on my terms, precisely as I refuse to fight on his."

"But you're forcing him to fight on yours."

"Not at all. He's forcing himself."

"A man can't be a conscientious objector in a psychological war."

"Spiritual, please; why are educated people so unwilling to use that word? And you're wrong, Stewart. General Zergoff can refuse to fight—I do wish you wouldn't call it that!—by having me executed whenever it pleases him."

"By doing that now—after he's told the rest of us he'll break you—it would be admitting defeat. Either way you win."

"It isn't a question of winning. It's the mutual respect we must learn to have for each other as human beings."

While Knight and I were talking, we could hear voices in the adjoining room, which General Zergoff was using as a staff office. Suddenly the pitch went higher and we were able to make out the words clearly.

"You've had ten hours, and all you produce is excuses." Zergoff paused and when he spoke again each word was spaced like the boom of a cannon. "I want Willard Clapper here by noon. Check the refugee detail. If Clapper's trying to get back here, he'll be somewhere on the road.

"Then send a car up for him. He'd wait in the mountains for us to pick him up—I agree with you there. He'd know he couldn't get

through to headquarters today without our help."

The voices simmered down.

Knight said, "Apparently, Stewart, you were right about Dr. Clapper. That appears to be obvious."

"If they put Clapper on the air with us—"

"The accuser and his victims, all joining hands in the noble cause of Soviet brotherhood." The Quaker chuckled. "It has amusing possibilities, as a radio show. I'm afraid it won't come off. Our intellectuals seem somewhat unwilling to co-operate."

"Largely as a result of your example."

"You give me too much credit. Perhaps I helped each of you see more clearly your own spiritual convictions; that's all."

Late in the afternoon the General found time for an interview with me. I thought I had been brought downstairs with Knight as a matter of convenience. But I discovered that Zergoff had specific plans for me. I was to be a sort of intellectual Judas, with my own neck at stake.

Zergoff came straight to the point. They had made recordings of my conversations with Knight, and the General believed the Quaker put unusual value upon my opinion. I was, therefore, ordered to persuade Knight to meet Zergoff's terms.

"You think I can do what you haven't?" I asked. "Suppose I refuse?"

"You will be shot." His voice was calm and self-assured. Fear prickled at the roots of my hair; I knew he meant precisely what he said. He added, "If I liquidate you, Dr. Roswell, I lose only one man. Granted, you have some use to us,



but you are expendable. You have taken no romantic moral stand in front of the others."

"But George Knight has."

"Exactly. He is setting the pace for the rest of you."

The door of the nook slid open. Zergoff looked up at a saluting subordinate. "Sir, the report on Clapper—"

"You've found him?"

"We sent a jeep into the mountains. Three men, commanded by a sergeant; all we could spare at the time. We have had no communication from them in six hours; we presume they're lost to guerilla action."

"American guerillas? Don't be a fool; these bourgeoisie wouldn't have the backbone—" Zergoff got a grip on his anger. "Send another truck—this time with enough men to do the job."

The junior officer saluted and de-

parted. Zergoff strode toward the door. He glanced at me and, more or less as an afterthought, he added, "One other point you should understand, Dr. Roswell: I'm giving you a deadline—eight o'clock tonight . . ."

My only problem was how much I should tell Knight. Although our spoken conversation was monitored, I could have written the facts and passed them over to him while we chatted of inconsequential things. For some fifteen minutes I sat facing him, talking bland nonsense, while I tried to make up my mind. And then even that problem no longer mattered.

We heard the sound of far away explosions in the harbor and a sudden scurrying of booted feet out of the living room.

The explosions were suddenly closer. A plane screamed overhead. The wall burst open, in a



blinding chaos of smoke and flying debris. I was flung against the couch. Books rained down on Knight and me, shielding us from the glass that flew out of the narrow windows.

Dazed, I pulled myself to my feet. I saw that the side wall was gone, open to the alley back of the house. It meant escape. At least a slim chance. Better than staying where we were. I lifted Knight in my arms and stumbled toward the opening.

Fire was licking at the house as I carried George Knight through the torn wall. The alley outside seemed to be clear. But suddenly a Communist soldier—an enormous man—loomed out of the shadows.

"Are you Americans?" he asked. I swung my fist; he caught it in his huge hand.

"My name is Chen Phiang," he whispered close to my ear. "I am

Chinese. I want to help you. Come, I will show you a place to hide."

After a moment, I followed him toward the side street. Flak from anti-aircraft shells was falling everywhere. Close by on the boulevard fire blazed against the dusk sky. I saw the broken skeleton of a fallen plane. The Chinese took George Knight in his arms.

"I am Chen Phiang," he said again. "I have at last remembered the wisdom of my paternal grandparent."

III. The City—Friday at dusk Chen Phiang

I AM ONLY seventeen. I have a poor memory of my paternal grandparent, who was a tea merchant in Hong Kong. He came frequently to visit my father's shop in Canton. I listened carefully when he spoke, because in those

days we honored the wisdom of our elders.

The soldiers of the people's government took me from my father's shop when I was very small. I remember my mother's tears and my father's terror. My mother held me against her heart. A soldier struck her with his rifle.

My father was a landowner and an enemy of the people. They told me that much later, at a school in Pekin, and I believed them, because they were skillful teachers. It was right for my mother and my father to be liquidated; I believed that, too, for I was a conscientious student. The teachers said I would not be a good citizen until I wiped away every memory of my parents and my grandparents.

At fifteen I began my military training. Six months later, because I was large and strong and quick-thinking, I was transferred to the paratroops. Our training was rigid. When we were not practicing in the planes our Russian allies gave us, we were hardening our muscles with athletic drills and hand-to-hand conflict. One hour each morning we had classes for political indoctrination; four hours every night we learned English.

During the indoctrination sessions, special political officers came from Pekin to explain current news. We had one mortal enemy, they told us: the Fascist government of the United States, which kept its own people in ignorance and slavery.

I know, now, it was all a lie. My heart is burning with the taste of betrayal. I was a part of it. I marched blindly with the others.

I learned to hate the enemy with a terrible loathing, for I had

cousins who lived in the United States. We had never met; it surprised me that they were even aware of my humble existence. Yet, from time to time, the political officer from Pekin brought me letters from my cousins—pitiful, tragic pleas for us to release them from their reactionary masters. Many of the men in my corps had similar letters from their own kin. Our hatred was inflamed.

On the day our Russian allies were forced to occupy Paris to protect the people from the Wall Street plutocrats, our military corps was ordered to leave Pekin.

Our corps flew north to a Russian base in Siberia, a new field more elaborately camouflaged than anything I had ever seen.

The paratroopers packed into the dugouts were all approximately my age; they had all been separated from their parents in early childhood and reared in government schools.

During the two days of our confinement the only language we were permitted to speak was English. The officers gave us American newspapers and periodicals to read.

Toward the end of the second day we heard the bombers overhead. The commissar ordered us out of our hammocks. We crowded together in front of the television screen. Automatic transmitters set up in the cities showed us the holocaust of the bombing, until the transmitters themselves were destroyed. Moscow, Pekin, Shanghai, Canton, Bombay, Leningrad, Berlin, Madrid: we watched them die. Our homes, the cities we prided, the people we knew as friends—destroyed by the sneak attack of American planes. Undeclared war.

The commissar brought us

liquor. We smashed the empty bottles against the earthen wall, as we would have smashed the enemy.

Shortly before dawn—I am not sure of the hour, because I had drunk myself into a stupor—we were loaded into the transports.

I slept until a needle pricked my arm. I opened my eyes and saw the commissar jerk out the empty hypodermic. "You'll feel fine in a minute," he said as he moved on to the next man.

Half an hour later we made the jump. Ours was not the first wave of the invasion. Soviet paratroops had landed during the night and seized key points. The morning sun was bright and clear as I parachuted toward Los Angeles.

I checked in at the nearest Soviet guard post. The Lieutenant in charge recorded my identification number and assigned me to the refugee detail. Our job was to unsnarl the traffic and get the people off the streets.

An interminable flood of cars continued to crowd in from the desert. And this, I thought, was happening on all the highways leading into the city. By weight of numbers alone the Americans could have subdued us. They seemed unaware of that.

By mid-afternoon my drugged god-feeling was gone. I had to hold to my post doggedly, fighting fatigue. My nerves were raw. I screamed orders at the prisoners, sometimes forgetting to speak in English. I used my gun more frequently, on very little provocation. My only emotion was hatred.

A very old, very crowded automobile came toward us. The motor was coughing; steam shot from the open radiator. I strode toward

it, swinging my submachine gun angrily.

The motor stalled again. A rear door banged open and four children spilled out; the eldest was no more than nine. They began to plead with me in their shrill, childish voices. Please, would I be patient? Their mother was sick; she had been burned by the bomb.

Their words made no impression, but their faces did. For they were Chinese. Chinese like myself.

The man got out. He began to address me awkwardly in Cantonese.

"I speak English," I told him proudly.

His face relaxed. "Sir, my wife is very ill. A doctor examined her; he said she might possibly live if—"

"What are you doing with these Fascist pigs?"

He looked me straight in the eye. "I am an American." He said it without shame. With a dignity that made me writhe, he returned to the car and lifted out his wife. A white man from another vehicle came and talked to him. They put the Chinese woman in the second car; a white woman slid behind the wheel, after first making a pillow of her coat and sliding it behind the Chinese woman's head.

That unexpected gesture of kindness gave me my first doubt. The letters from my cousin had said that the Chinese, without exception, were the most persecuted slaves of capitalism. Yet now, with my own eyes, I had seen a white family help a Chinese woman.

The four children climbed into the second car. Since there was no one left to drive the wreck belonging to the Chinese, I ordered four prisoners to push it into a side street, to clear the road. Until it

was out of the way, the second car was stalled, and all the long column of vehicles behind it. The eldest Chinese child—a girl—got out and walked toward me.

"Do you know a working class man whose name is Lin Yeng?" I asked her.

"You talk in such a foolish way. What's a working class? The only kind of classes I know about are the ones in school, and we don't work unless we have to."

My nerves began to tense in anger again; the tone of my voice went up a notch. "Do you know Lin Yeng?" I repeated.

"No, but lots of Chinese live in Los Angeles.

"How would I find Lin Yeng?" I asked. "He's a cousin of mine; we have corresponded for many years."

"Try the 'phone book. But take a tip from me, soldier; I don't think he's going to give you the red carpet treatment."

Late in the afternoon we were relieved at the barricade by fresh troops. I reported back to the guard post. The Lieutenant gave me my billet assignment in a hotel overlooking the public bathing beach, a mile or so south of the harbor.

I ate in the hotel dining room, at a table with two infantry privates and a Russian air force sergeant. It was a magnificent meal. We had all the food and liquor of a captured city at our disposal.

During a lull I asked—simply to be saying something, not because it really mattered to me—I asked why we were so sure the American counterattack would come from the sea.

The sergeant spoke up, "I was in one of the planes. I saw the orders. We built a wall around the

city, so we could have time to bring our troops in." He drank and the whiskey spilled down his chin. "Not a real wall, you understand. But it works the same. We dropped a ring of baby H-bombs all around the city, a couple of hundred miles back from the coast. One hell of a big ditch. And it'll stay radioactive maybe a week. After that they can cross it—if they wear the right equipment—but by that time it'll be too late."

So the bombs had been ours. We had murdered defenseless people.

I gulped the rest of my meal. It was tasteless. I left the dining room. The hotel lobby was jammed with our troops, all very drunk.

I saw a telephone booth and I remembered what the Chinese girl had said. In the directory I read through the listings until I found the name of Lin Yeng. I copied the address on a scrap of paper.

His address was south of the hotel, two city blocks back from the beachfront boulevard.

The houses behind the boulevard were less imposing, although still larger than anything I was accustomed to. Lin Yeng's address was in a small, secondary shopping district. I passed a vast hall, called a super-market, a drug store, a cleaning establishment, before I saw Lin Yeng's place of business—a Chinese restaurant on the corner. His name in large gold letters was painted on the window.

I walked down a narrow alley. Dangerous, perhaps, in an enemy city, but I was well armed. Behind some of the shops there were living quarters. Lin Yeng had an apartment over a big garage, where I saw a gleaming car called a Cadillac as well as a delivery truck with my cousin's name painted on the panel. My cousin? No,

this must be another Lin Yeng. My cousin was a worker. He had told me that many times in his letters. It had to be true; still, something within me drove me to make certain.

In the apartment I saw a light. I crept up the outer steps, until I could see through a partly opened window, where the curtain had been drawn not quite to the sill. The room was furnished with all the magnificence of a party official's residence: many comfortable chairs, a lounge, Chinese scrolls on the wall, jade work standing on a side table, at least four reading lamps—in one room!—a tremendous radio, and a television set. This Lin Yeng must have been a very rich plutocrat to be able to afford a private television screen for his own family alone.

In an adjoining room I saw two pretty Chinese girls—both my age, or a little younger—at a dining table. A man and a woman, beyond my restricted line of vision, were talking.

"This cousin of yours in China, my dear—do you suppose he's still safe?"

"Chen Phiang?" the man asked in a distressed voice. "No, they would dispose of him now."

"But you sent all that money so faithfully for so many years!"

"Blackmail. Chen Phiang is no use to them any longer. We did all we could to help him; we must remember that. Perhaps they were kind enough to give him a merciful death."

I stole away, dazed and sick at heart from what I had heard. This was my cousin; I could no longer doubt that. He had paid party blood money in order to help me, a stranger he had never met. To

help me!—and now I stood at his door in the uniform of the conqueror. I felt the anguish of shame and dishonor.

I reached the ocean front close to the palace. Two Russian sentries, armed with automatic rifles, challenged me. I fumbled blindly for words. One of them jerked open my tunic and looked at my identification disc. Their military manner relaxed.

"Out on the prowl, soldier?"

"Everything was—locked up," I stammered. I motioned toward the men in front of the big house. "What's all this for?"

"Command headquarters. General Zergoff." The sentry said.

"There's another reason for the guard," the second sentry put in, to make sure I'd be properly impressed. "We have twenty-five prisoners inside. American intellectuals. After the Comrade General finishes their re-education, they'll sing their song to our tune."

"I thought all intellectuals were enemies of the people."

"They're for the firing squad; you can be sure of that." The Russian grinned. "After we're through with them."

We heard a roar of planes. Every eye turned toward the sky. Anti-aircraft guns in the harbor began to spit angrily. One of the sentries cried, "A Fascist raid!" They began to run for cover.

I stood where I was, paralyzed with inner horror and disgust, the last bitter ash of shame.

Then a phosphorous shell from an attacking plane burst over the harbor and in the white glare I saw the rows upon rows of Soviet submarines.

Since the Soviet submarines were already in the American port, they must have left their

Asiatic pens more than a week ago, under orders to begin the invasion. That had been at least four days before the crisis began.

Built upon that fact, everything else formed a single, terrifying pattern: the English they made us learn; our practice jumps over a plain marked with the streets of Los Angeles; the new, elaborately camouflaged Siberian bases, where the invasion troops had been safely concealed from American bombers. Protesting humanitarianism, screaming peace and brotherhood, we had planned this war for years.

Somewhere a soldier shouted at me, "Take cover, fool!"

I was behind the headquarters mansion, in a narrow alley. The guards were gone. I was alone.

Suddenly a plane soared directly overhead, out of control. A bomb exploded under the bluff and the earth rocked. Another hit the headquarters palace. Debris and dust and flying plaster flew in my face, flinging me back against a wall. I saw a tongue of fire licking at the gapping hole torn in the side of the house. The plane crashed in the street; the fuel tank caught fire.

In the orange glare I saw two men stumble through the broken wall. One was so badly wounded his face was unrecognizable; the second man was carrying him. They were not in uniform. They must, then, be two of the intellectuals imprisoned in the house.

I leaped toward them. They shrank away, trying to run. I caught the arm of the man who was unhurt. "Are you Americans?" I demanded.

Instead of replying, the man swung his fist at me weakly.

"My name is Chen Phiang," I said. "I am Chinese; I want to

help you. Come, I will show you a place to hide."

My shame and dishonor diminished a little. This my paternal grandparent approved; one small thing to make amends for the red nightmare that had so long swallowed up the soul of China.

III. The Valley—Friday afternoon Boris Yorovich

TWENTY minutes after we picked up the wounded Negro, Pat Thatcher pulled the Cadillac to a stop in the village of Big Bear. It was the first American town I had ever seen.

We stopped in front of a drug store. Pat Thatcher got out and pounded on the door, while Jerry Bonhill and I lifted the Negro out of the car.

Having raised no one by his knocking, Thatcher wrapped the tail of his shirt around his fist and smashed open the window in the door. He slipped his hand through the glass and turned the lock. Bonhill and I carried the Negro into the building. The old man shoved a display of stuffed toys from a table and we lay the Negro on it.

Cheryl Fineberg and Mrs. Bonhill came in with Jim Riley. Dr. Clapper remained outside on the step, watching us but refusing to have any part in our invasion of private property. The women cut away the clothing from the Negro's arms, while Thatcher brought jars of salve from a side shelf.

"People," the Negro whispered in a choked voice barely audible. "I found people?"

"You'll be all right now."

"There are others. Help . . ." His voice trailed off. Mrs. Bonhill stooped beside him and slipped her arm under his head. After a mo-



ment he spoke again, his thick, torn lips close to her ear. "They're back on the hill. On the hill. All right except—except tired. Please help them. They need . . ."

His head slumped forward. Mrs. Bonhill bent over his chest. Then she stood up slowly, her eyes filmed with tears. "He's dead."

"Put up your hands." A voice sounded behind us.

We swung around to face a small, plump, white-haired woman wearing a gingham dress and ankle-high mountain boots, gray with dust. She held a hunting rifle aimed at us unwaveringly.

"Sorry, ma'am," Thatcher apologized. "We didn't know anyone was here." He gestured toward the Negro. "We were trying to get drugs for—"

"You're from the city?"

"We'll pay for what we've used."

"This isn't my store. You're welcome to it."

The plump woman seemed less suspicious. She shot a glance suddenly at Cheryl, demanding her name and her street address. The woman asked Mrs. Bonhill the same question. The two answers seemed to satisfy her. She nodded and muttered, "That fits." Abruptly she lowered her gun. "I had to make sure you weren't Reds."

"These people are subversives," Clapper hissed from the door. He pointed at me. "That man's a Russian officer. They stole my car. If you'll make Thatcher give me my keys—"

"Dr. Clapper was the only one of you I recognized. If he says you're subversives, that makes you fine in my book."

Clapper turned and stormed off down the street. The woman laughed. "He won't go far." She told us her name was Virginia Grant. She

was a retired high school history teacher.

"You're the only one who stayed?"

"No, Henry Jenkins is here, too. Hank, we call him. An old loafer who has an idea he's going to strike gold over in Holcomb Valley. As soon as it dawned on him this morning that we were alone, he started out to drink up all the liquor in Big Bear. He's still in one of the saloons, I imagine."

"The Negro told us there were survivors somewhere in the hills," Cheryl Fineberg put in. "We'll have to try to find them."

"We might pick up his trail and back-track on it," Jerry Bonhill suggested.

"You men do that," the teacher decided. "While you're gone, we'll work out some sort of housing arrangement."

"I wish we could get some news," she continued. "Ben Canster had all sorts of fancy equipment in his appliance shop, but I can't seem to get it hitched up right. Ben didn't use regular electric outlets. He has his own Delco plant, and I don't know how to make the thing go."

I volunteered, "Maybe I could help, Miss Grant. We had a good deal of basic electronics in our training for—" I caught the slip. "That is, in the school I was attending."

"Stay here and see what you can do," Thatcher suggested. "Jerry and I can round up the survivors."

Before they left, Thatcher drove the Negro's body to a pine-sheltered knoll overlooking the lake, where Virginia Grant said we could bury him. While I scooped a shallow grave in the soft earth, she sent Jim Riley to carry stones up from the lakeside and pile them

into a pyramided marker. With a teacher's eye for detail, she made two legible copies of the Negro's name and address from the driver's license she found in his wallet.

"We must keep an accurate record," she said. "Someday his family may want to locate the body."

Cheryl Fineberg and I were alone by the grave. Cheryl helped me tramp the soil over the body.

Virginia Grant rejoined us then. We finished the Negro's grave and walked back to the village. The teacher took us to Ben Canster's appliance shop, where she had earlier broken open the display room door. In a back room I found an elaborate, all-frequency receiving apparatus. It was easy to put it in operation. The receiver was powered by a Delco electric unit, driven by a gas motor, which made the receiver independent of the regular electric supply.

Jim Riley and I explored the back of the appliance shop. In a separate, frame building we found a radio transmitter. Ben Canster spared nothing for his hobby. It was a magnificent transmitter in excellent order, and powered like the receiver by the independent Delco unit. While I was testing it, we heard uncertain footsteps on the gravel outside. A tall, thin, old man, his white hair uncombed and a gray stubble on his chin, staggered to the door. He was wearing khaki trousers, a frayed, cotton shirt, and very battered boots; he stank of sweat and liquor.

"That you, Ben?" he asked, peering into the semi-darkness.

"It must be Hank Jenkins," Jim Riley whispered to me.

I held out my hand. "My name's Yorovich."

"Russian! You guys got here damn' fast. Might know you'd smell out all this liquor."

The boy said, "No, we're refugees from Los Angeles—"

"All the worse. City people! Always drink up everything in sight. No moderation. Well, I got the Double Seven staked out; you ain't gettin' in there."

He stumbled away, weaving down the street and humming an off-key melody.

It was after one o'clock that afternoon when Jim Riley came running over from the hotel to tell us Bonhill and Thatcher were back. "And we're going to have dinner right away."

"Did they find the survivors?"

"Sure. Two ladies and a colored boy." Jim's eyes sparkled. "His name is Ted Fisher and he's just my age and he wasn't hurt at all!"

The two women Bonhill and Thatcher had rescued were both in their thirties.

The taller of the two, a slim blonde, whose name was Janice Gage, was very attractive—except for the shadow of horror in her gray eyes. The other refugee, small, brown-haired, pert-faced, was Lola Donne, a buxom, sensuous woman who seemed on the verge of overflowing the tight dress she wore.

While we ate, they told us what had happened on the desert. The two women were strangers. Each of them, in separate cars, had been among the first evacuees to leave Los Angeles.

Near Lucerne Valley they were caught in the frantic exodus of automobiles coming down the east highway out of Big Bear. Janice Gage's car was pushed off the shoulder of the road. She struck

Lola Donne's coupe and both machines were wrecked.

Then the bombs had fallen. With eyes glazed Janice relived the horror. Only she, Lola, the boy Ted and his father survived. The Negro was hurt worse than any of them.

With the force of his personality alone the Negro kept them going throughout the night. The road above them was impassable for a mile or more. They had to climb through mesquite and manzanita. They might have returned to the highway above the slide, but by that time the Negro must have lost his sight. He led them by instinct, knowing they had to move constantly upward and feeling out their path by the inclination of the land. At dawn the women were too exhausted to go any farther. The Negro said he'd get help. In the pale light they saw his face and hands for the first time—the skin was in ribbons of burned flesh. And he still did not let them know he was blind. By sheer animal strength he managed to reach the highway, where we found him.

We lingered over the meal, under no compulsion of time. We had no appointments to keep. Hank Jenkins wandered in and joined us, bringing a half-empty fifth of liquor. Virginia Grant made a place for him at the table and piled his plate with food. Mrs. Bonhill made a pleasant ceremony of giving Jerry and me new clothes which she had taken from a sporting goods shop.

Jerry and I went into a storage room behind the registration desk and put on the clothes. I winced when I felt the wool against my back. Bonhill laughed and said I had a touch of sunburn. As I went back to the lobby, I caught a

glimpse of myself in a mirror on the door, and the man I saw was a stranger.

An American. The clothes symbolically completed my transformation, from Soviet paratrooper to American in eight hours. I belonged. And I understood, then, that America was not a nation, but a state of mind.

Cheryl Fineberg came and slid on the lounge between us. Bonhill tipped his cigar at a jaunty angle, grinning at her.

"I saw Willie Clapper go out right after dinner," she said, in a low voice. "He hasn't come back yet. I don't want to get everybody stirred up over nothing, but I think we should know what he's up to."

"We'll find him," Bonhill said.

Outside the hotel, he went east on the village street and I turned west. I saw Clapper a minute later, a hundred yards ahead of me. He slithered out of a sporting goods shop, jamming something into his coat pocket, and went into the drug store where the Negro died.

As I ran toward the store, I saw him enter a telephone booth and drop a coin into the slot. After a moment, he began to jiggle the receiver hook. He didn't make his connection—fortunately, for it was a reasonable guess that he was trying to contact the invasion headquarters in Los Angeles. He met me at the door of the store. He shrugged noncommittally when I asked why he was telephoning.

Far away, on the road west of the village, we heard the hum of a motor. It stopped occasionally and then moved toward us again.

"More refugees?" I asked.

Clapper threw back his handsome head and laughed uproariously. "Bonhill's car was the last one

over the road last night before the fire closed the highway. Your pretty dream is finished, Lieutenant—and so soon, too. Academically, it would have been amusing to see just how much trash they could make you swallow." He put his hand on my shoulder and with the other pointed toward the sound of the approaching vehicle. "That will be our mutual friends from Los Angeles. If I couldn't get back to them, they had to come looking for me—obviously."

In blind rage I smashed my fist into his face—again and again, until he fell against the door and collapsed inside the shop.

We weren't licked. We couldn't be. And we had found a secret weapon, the stuff of the spirit that no arms could reach. I turned and ran back toward the hotel, signaling Jerry Bonhill with my hand. We had five minutes, perhaps less, before the Soviet car would be in the village. But we were Americans. That was all the time we needed.

IV. The City—Saturday morning Dr. Stewart Roswell

CHEN PHIANG took us two blocks from the Dragen house to a garage apartment at the rear of a Chinese restaurant. The American planes were still raiding the harbor and above us the sky filled with cotton puffs from the exploding anti-aircraft shells.

We stumbled up the wooden stairway and Chen Phiang knocked on the door of the apartment—three times before it was opened. The soldier and a Chinese spoke rapidly in Cantonese and the door was flung wide to us. Chen Phiang put George Knight on a couch. Three women bent beside him,

rubbing his hands and working pillows behind his head.

The man and Chen Phiang deluged each other with a flood of shrill Chinese. Their meeting was highly emotional. They threw their arms around each other—the small, dark-haired Chinese-American and the enormous man in the Communist uniform. Abruptly it was over. The soldier departed.

The Chinese shook my hand. His face still quivered with emotion; his fingers were trembling, warm with sweat. I told him who we were and how we had escaped from the Sov'et headquarters. He glanced at George Knight—still unconscious—and said in a tone of deep humility,

"The Quaker teacher does an honor to my home."

"You know him?"

"Only his books. We are Buddhists, but all men of honor speak to the same end."

The three women brought a bottle of rubbing alcohol and washed Knight's face. The Quaker opened his eyes. Their kindness he accepted and understood at once, without words.

The Chinese told us his name was Lin Yeng. The three women were sisters, his wife Barbara and the beautiful teen-agers Charlotte and Betty Sutong.

Lin Yeng could tell us very little about Chen Phiang, except that the soldier was a cousin, held for years in a Chinese concentration camp—or so they had always believed...

The next morning George Knight walked without my help into the front room of the apartment for breakfast—slowly, that's true, and dragging his right foot painfully, but under his own power. Considering how thoroughgoing

Zergoff's education of the Quaker had been, Knight had made a remarkable recovery.

The Yengs had spread a round, teakwood table with bamboo mats and blue-glazed china. I saw the traditional, handleless teacups and the round rice bowls. But instead of tea, they gave us Coca Cola to drink.

We heard footsteps on the stairs and Chen Phiang flung open the door. His uniform was soiled and disheveled. His flat, Oriental face was drawn tight with fatigue. He stood by our table, twisting his cap in his hand. Lin Yeng offered him food, but he turned it down.

"We'll take it all soon enough," he answered darkly. "Eat while you can." He said he had been on emergency duty all night—a search detail. General Zergoff had two hundred men combing the harbor area for Knight and me. The force was later increased to five hundred. Chen Phiang volunteered for the duty, to misdirect the search if it came too close to his cousin's apartment. His determination to save us had become the driving force of his being.

"The Russians will order a house to house search shortly," Chen Phiang declared. "Not this morning, perhaps. We still can't spare the manpower. But before that happens, I must get you away from the city."

"How?" Lin Yeng asked. "The roads are barricaded."

"There is a mountain place near here. I have heard talk of it. Some of our men were sent to look for a certain Dr. Clapper. If he is hidden so well, you might be, too."

I glanced at Knight. "Clapper does have a cabin somewhere between Running Springs and Big Bear."

"When the time comes," the Chinese soldier asked, "can you show me the proper road?"

"Yes."

"I will find transportation for us. Our submarines fought a naval battle last night. No one knows the outcome, but we expect an American task force to try a landing sometime today. They will be repulsed, naturally, but in the beginning there will be much confusion. That will be our opportunity to escape."

When the soldier turned to leave, Lin Yeng stopped him at the door. He said he had a gift of courtesy and he handed Chen Phiang a six-bottle carton of Coke. "In America, cousin, this is our national drink. A friend of America will use nothing else." He repeated very slowly, "Nothing else."

"Drink no water," Lin Yeng went on. "Go unwashed and unclean."

When Chen Phiang was gone, Barbara Yeng said anxiously, "I do hope he understood."

"I made it as plain as I dared," her husband replied.

"Not to me," I told them.

"When the milk collectors came during the night," Lin Yeng explained, "they told us. They were taking the warning to every American family. The Soviet bombers cut the irrigation canals that cross the desert, and the water still flowing to the city was affected by radiation. Before the week is out we'll have a water famine, but long before that every person who drinks the city water will undoubtedly suffer radiation poisoning. That means even more misery and a gruesome, painful death for those who consume the water."

V. The Valley—Friday night
Jerry Bonhill

THE plan was Yorovich's. He said the Russian car would head straight for the hotel as soon as the driver spotted Clapper's Cadillac. He wanted us to be concealed on both sides of the street, with rifles taken from a sporting goods store. We were to fire in front of the car and behind it, trying to make enough noise to suggest a large guerilla force.

In the meantime, from the second floor of the hotel, he would demand the surrender of the Soviets—in Russian, the parade-ground arrogance of a Russian officer. The psychological confusion should do the trick. Yorovich wanted Thatcher to have the submachine gun and to be posted with him in the second floor.

"If anything goes wrong," he said, "Thatcher, shoot to kill."

"I have one objection," Cheryl put in. "You should have the submachine gun, Boris. Pat would be more use to us down here."

The Russian blushed. His dark face was suddenly boyish and it was very easy for me to remember, then, that he was no older than I. "I didn't think you'd want me—that is, if I had that weapon in my hands I could—"

"Give him the keys to the car," I told Pat.

Yorovich looked at me with inexpressible gratitude. He tried to say something, but all he was able to do was swallow—hard. Thatcher handed over the keys. The Russian ran into the street and unlocked the trunk compartment of the Cadillac. Three seconds later he was on his way up the stairs, the gun cradled in his arm.

"Let's snap to it," I said to the

others. "Who's going outside with us?" They volunteered unanimously, even Jim Riley and the colored boy, Ted Fisher. I sent them into the kitchen of the coffee shop. I asked Hank Jenkins to stick with them—more to keep him off the streets than because I thought the kids needed watching. The rest of us filed through the sporting goods store, snatching up rifles and boxes of cartridges. An emergency seems to generate its own brand of efficiency. In less than two minutes we were concealed on both sides of the street.

The Soviet jeep entered the village. At an open window in the second floor of the hotel I saw Boris Yorovich stiffen and raise his gun to his shoulder. The jeep moved toward us. I counted four infantrymen, all of them armed with submachine guns. The two in back were standing, scanning the walks, their weapons cocked against their upper arms.

The jeep was in front of the hotel. In the stillness I heard the driver say very distinctly, "The Cadillac matches our description of Dr. Clapper's car." Afternoon sunlight, slanting over the hills, fell on his face. He was very young and very tired. The faint shadow of a blond beard was on his chin.

Then Yorovich's command echoed over the street. I saw the sudden fear and indecision in the young Russian's eyes. All four men looked up. Simultaneously the drug-store door banged open and Willie Clapper staggered out. They snapped their guns to their shoulder. "I'm Clapper!" he cried. "Don't shoot."

From our concealed positions we began to fire. Yorovich's voice barked again. Bullets from his submachine gun lashed across the hood of the jeep, shattering the wind-



shield. The four men dropped their weapons and raised their hands. It was over.

No, it was just beginning. We swarmed around the car. Thatcher scooped up their weapons. I pushed the captives into the hotel.

We put the Russians on a lounge. Yorovich came down the steps and stood looking at them, the sub-machine gun draped carelessly over his arm. He grinned and said something in Russian. They stared at him, their eyes wide with fear. He spoke again and stiffly they reeled off their names and the other information he demanded.

Andrei Trenev. Infantryman, eighteen, a small, fair-haired, blue-eyed boy conscripted from a Ukrainian farm co-operative.

Vasili Shostovar. Paratrooper, twenty, shallow-chested, beady-eyed, dark-haired, a mechanic from a Moscow implement depot; he had a two-year trade school education and appeared more sophisticated than the others.

Igor Morrenski. Air-corps sergeant, seventeen, small and sturdy, with a broad, peasant face vaguely suggesting Mongol ancestry; he came from Stalingrad, where he had worked on a farm co-operative.

Feodor Psorkarian. Paratrooper, seventeen. A tall, handsome, wily-eyed boy with an unruly shock of yellow hair and laughter on his lips. A Cossack and proud of it. Of them all, perhaps the most adaptable personality.

Virginia Grant took over the job at that point. "I think, we'll get you some respectable clothes," she said. "I disapprove of uniforms. Jerry, take them up to the men's shop and let them pick out something to wear." So I'd get her point, she repeated it firmly, "Let them do the choosing."

Shostovar protested like a good dialectician: we had no right to take their uniforms.

"If you want war on your terms, we take what we like," the teacher answered, lifting her rifle in a gesture that was unmistakable. "On ours, you have a choice. Make up your mind, Russian—that's the American way—but don't overlook all the consequences."

Yorovich and I took the four men to a sporting goods store, herding them carefully away from the racks of weapons. The Cossack took us at our word. We said he could take what he wanted and he did just that. He squeezed his long, muscular legs into corduroy riding breeches, and he found a flame-colored, silk shirt. Around his waist he tied a broad, yellow scarf. He was delighted with what he saw when he examined himself in the full-length mirror. One by one the others stripped off their uniforms. Naked, they pawed through the display of clothing, whispering over the workmanship and awed by the abundance.

We fed the men at a table in the hotel lobby. None of us was able to eat so soon, except for Jim Riley and Ted Fisher. The two kids tore themselves away from their games long enough to plow through plates of beans and a quart of milk.

Willie Clapper had not come into the hotel when we were feeding the men. I didn't want to make an issue of it in front of them. Afterward Pat Thatcher and I tried to find him, without any luck. There were scores of places where he could have hidden in that deserted village. Pat and I were both certain he hadn't gone far.

"This could be dynamite," Pat told me.

I agreed with him. "I suppose



Willie's planning to steal the Caddy or the jeep somehow and make tracks for L.A."

"Let him go, Jerry. In this set-up he's nothing but bait. They'll keep sending more men after him as long as he's here."

"It would be a hell of a lot worse if he got away. They'd send bombing planes, then, to wipe us out."

"They can smash up the village. We'd take to the hills; we'll have to sooner or later, in any case."

"You called him bait, Pat. Maybe that's not such a bad idea. Let the men come. We'll pull the same thing we did today."

He took a cigar from his pocket and jammed it into my mouth. "It's your world, Jerry. If I'd been giving the orders this afternoon, they'd all be dead."

"Tonight we'll set up a watch in the hotel lobby. You and Yorovich and I."

"It looks as if we'll have to trust that Russian," Pat admitted. "You were right about him, Jerry."

"We'll give him the first watch, up to midnight. I'll take it from there until four. You cover the rest."

"You're biting off the tough part for yourself."

"I know that." I pulled on my cigar. "It's my world, you tell me. I'm ready to fight for it."

We had our community bedded down inside the hotel by eight o'clock. Cheryl and I rounded up Hank Jenkins; he was willing to call it a day when we let him take a bottle to his room. The four Russians we put into two storage rooms on the first floor back of the lobby. It seemed the safest place to keep them, since Thatcher, Yorovich and I were sleeping in the lobby. The men still had to be considered prisoners; I had no illusions about that.

Boris Yorovich shouldered a sub-machine gun and posted himself on the walk in front of the hotel. Pat Thatcher lay on a leather lounge under a woolen blanket. Moonlight slanted through a window on the old man's face; I saw the deep lines of exhaustion. Pat had given us everything he had. I began to understand why he had made such an effort to wake me up to my responsibilities. When Pat thrust the cigar between my teeth, he was resigning a leadership he hadn't the energy to hold. The act had been a symbol to him, perhaps more so than it was to me. When Pat was asleep, I walked to the front window and stood looking at the street. Fifty feet away I saw Yorovich's shadow, grotesquely lengthened by the angle of moonlight. The window was open. I heard the far cry of an animal in the forest above the village; I heard the wind in the pines.

And I felt terribly alone—a hollow, empty solitude. I realized how much decision had been made for us by Pat. That job had become mine. I couldn't run back into my boyhood because I wasn't ready for anything else. I had to be ready. The Soviet invasion, whether I liked it or not, had made me a man.

I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned and saw Cheryl in the darkness behind me. "I want to talk, Jerry," she whispered. "Let's go outside. We mustn't waken Pat."

"I picked up a rifle and stuffed cartridges in my shirt pocket. "In case we meet Willie Clapper," I explained.

Cheryl and I passed Yorovich and walked toward the lake. The moon was very bright; stars blazed in the sky with the special brilliance given them by mountain heights. Cheryl drew me down on the pine needles beside her.

"I was so sure of it in my room, Jerry, but now—" She took my hand. Her fingers were hot and trembling. "I was thinking about my parents. Objectively. I haven't done that before. I knew I was alone. Everything is gone. We're never going back to it again."

"You grew up, Cheryl. We can't be schoolkids any more."

"Growing up—but even more than that, Jerry." She waved her hand toward the hills. "Out there is death and horror, a world falling apart. So little of it has touched us really, but I feel it like a terrible nightmare."

"We have to build a new world on—"

"I'm not talking about a world, Jerry." Her voice dropped to a whisper, like the gentle lapping of the lake water on the stony beach. "Tonight I became a woman, and a woman makes the abstract into something personal. It's the way we are. The world is screaming death in my soul. Death; death! And inside of me is a cry of life—far stronger, far more real. Let the politicians tear the world down; a woman brings it alive again."

Suddenly she pressed her lips on mine. I felt a surge of excitement—like ice; like fire—blaze through my body. My arms tightened around her. "You're sure, Cheryl?" I asked. "You've made up your mind?"

"Not by the old standards, Jerry. Not love—the way my father had it in the movies he made."

We lay back on the knoll. The moon glowed above us, making a scarlet halo of her red hair. Her hands fumbled at my shirt. I felt the caress of her fingers on my chest. . . .

Afterward Cheryl lay in my arms, the filmy web of her hair against my cheek.

She raised herself on her elbow and looked into my face, laughing softly. "You know, Jerry, I don't think I can truthfully say I picked you for looks." With her finger she traced the muscle football had built across my chest and belly. I felt no embarrassment, as I would have a week before.

The ecstasy burned in me again and I drew Cheryl against my breast.

And then our dream was shattered. Far away we heard a pistol shot and the high hum of an automobile motor. I pulled Cheryl to her feet and snatched up my rifle. We ran over the uneven ground toward the hotel.

VI. The City—Saturday morning Chen Phiang

I WALKED slowly away from my cousin's home, carrying his strange gift in my hands.

I stopped in an alleyway where none of our men could see what I did, and I broke open a bottle by cracking the cap against a wall. The brown fluid was refreshing, sweet, in no way unpleasant. I drank it slowly, savoring the unfamiliar tang. This was a small thing, compared to the enormous crime I committed in rescuing the two intellectuals, yet the American drink had more meaning to me. It was a tangible act of defiance.

Nonetheless, it seemed an odd gift. Had my cousin understood the feeling of independence it would give me? Perhaps. But his eyes had said more than his words. "Drink no water." For some reason that was important.

As I walked back to my hotel I passed the Soviet headquarters house. The side wall was broken and burned, but there was no other dam-

age. General Zergoff was still stationed there, for the heavy guard was still around the house. A red ambulance stood in the street. The rear door was open. Three doctors in Russian uniforms were examining a man strapped to a wheeled stretcher.

I saw General Zergoff storm out of the house, trailing a retinue of clerks. The General looked at the man on the stretcher. He issued orders to the doctors, chopping the air with his hand in the assertive gesture so typical of the political commissar. The doctors bundled the man back into the ambulance. The vehicle shot down the boulevard, its siren screaming.

I went into a dark booth far at the back and I opened another bottle of Coke. I drank it slowly and again I had that feeling of well-being that came with honest defiance. I was one of them and I was not afraid.

Sound trucks came through the streets, blasting an official bulletin issued by the Soviet High Command. We were not to be alarmed by the large number of casualties. The men were not victims of an American poison—the Fascist enemies of the people hadn't that much ingenuity—but of their own conscientiousness. Some troops during the night had come down too close to the bombed areas. They were suffering minor radioactive burns. But they would be given expert care by Soviet physicians, and each man was automatically awarded the Order of Lenin for his courage.

The confusion in the streets was the situation I wanted. As another red ambulance swung past the door, I suddenly realized how I could get my two intellectuals out of the city.

I left the saloon and ran toward my cousin's house.

VII. The Valley—Saturday morning. Jerry Bonhill

BORIS YOROVICH lay on the walk, blood spilling over his shirt from a bullet wound in his shoulder. The Cadillac was gone. I bent over the Russian. "Clapper!" he whispered. He pointed weakly toward the door of the hotel.

"Take care of him, Cheryl," I snapped. She nodded.

In the lobby I groped for the matches and lighted the oil lamp we had left as an emergency light on the registration desk. I saw Pat Thatcher. His skull was smashed. His shirt had been ripped open in Clapper's eagerness to get the keys to the Cadillac.

Numbly I pulled the blanket over Pat's face. For a moment I was paralyzed by grief. Thatcher's murder had more meaning to me than the death of my own father.

I heard voices in the upper hall and I shook the weight of grief from my mind. One of the storage room doors burst open and Feodor Psorkarian hobbled across the threshold. The Cossack's feet and hands were tied. He was working his head furiously to free himself from the yellow scarf gagging him. I cut him free. He cried his excited, Russian anger. Then, remembering, I wouldn't understand him, he said in almost equally chaotic English,

"After him we go! That spy; that saboteur! He came; he threatened—like the secret police. Always the fear. Always the guns!" The Cossack pulled me toward the door. "Our jeep. You have the keys, my American friend. We still have time to stop them!"

I looked in his eyes. What I saw made my decision for me. I threw him my rifle. "O.K., Cossack, let's go."

We leaped into the jeep. I drove. Psorkarian steadied my rifle on the hood while he held his eye on the road ahead of us.

He was calm enough then to give me a coherent picture of what had happened. Willie Clapper broke into the storage room which the Cossack shared with Andrei Trenev. Clapper was armed with a pistol he had stolen from a village sporting goods shop that afternoon. He asked their help to escape. The Cossack refused.

After persuasion failed, Clapper tried threats. He said he would turn all the prisoners over to the secret police, but if the Cossack and Trenev would help him he promised them leniency. The Cossack had heard Russian promises before; he wasn't buying any. Trenev, of course, was frightened into obedience. He stood at attention and saluted Clapper. Psorkarian swung his fist at Trenev, but Clapper struck the Cossack with the handle of his pistol.

We were two hundred yards behind the Cadillac when Clapper first spotted us. Andrei Trenev opened fire with his rifle. Feodor Psorkarian adjusted his sights casually. He muttered, "Try to outrun a Cossack, will you?" He took deliberate aim and fired. The rear window of the Cadillac shattered.

He fired twice in rapid succession. Both rear tires on the Cadillac blew. The car lurched into the embankment, slid along the granite, and spun off the highway. We heard the crash of rending metal and glass as I jammed on the brakes.

The wreckage lay precariously suspended on a narrow ledge forty feet below the road. We heard no sound except the slow turning of a wheel suspended in space. The Cossack and I climbed down the rocks. Clapper was dead, the post of the

steering column rammed like a lance through his chest. Andrei Trenev lay face up on the ledge, his right leg bent grotesquely beneath him. He was conscious; his face was twisted with pain and terror.

The Cossack stood over him, holding the rifle like a club. "Shall I finish him?"

"No!" I threw the back of my arm against his wrist. In his surprise Psorkarian almost lost his balance. "We'll take him back to the village."

We made a stretcher of our shirts and carried him back to the jeep. There was a flask of vodka in the pocket; Psorkarian tipped it against Trenev's lips and the pain washed slowly out of his eyes. The fear went with it.

"You're helping me," the boy whispered.

It was close to midnight when we returned to the hotel. We carried Trenev into the lobby and lay him on a lounge. The others were all waiting for us. Boris Yorovich sat propped in a chair, his shoulder wrapped with gauze. Janice Gage was beside him, holding his hand.

Hank said he would sit up with his patients. This was important for the restoration of his ego.

The next morning we buried Pat Thatcher beside the Negro's grave, on the knoll overlooking the lake.

We were all there; even Andrei Trenev had been carried to the knoll on a stretcher. I was acutely aware of my own position. Subtly each of them acknowledged my leadership, the choice Pat had made. They were watching me, wondering if I could carry it off. I knew that, too. A kid of nineteen!—I felt one moment of cold panic, and then Cheryl's hand was in mine and I was a man again.

In dead silence I shook the hand

of each of the Russians. I turned very deliberately and, with Cheryl beside me, walked back toward the hotel.

"Was that wise?" she asked. "So soon?"

"There's nothing else we can do, Cheryl. Pat told me Clapper was bait as long as we kept him here. He's dead; we can't get rid of him, now. The Russians will keep sending men after him. We have to trust the ones we have. A military stand is ridiculous."

And we didn't have long to wait. Less than half an hour after the others returned to the hotel, we heard a motor on the road east of the village. I told Yorovich to give our Russians their submachine guns; we'd try the same type of ambush that had worked so successfully the day before.

I heard the truck motor. I heard Yorovich's shout and the burst of gunfire. A confusion of voices. More gunfire. Then silence. Slow footsteps on the marble tile of the lobby. Feodor Psorkarian stood at the coffee shop door. He held the submachine gun at an angle in his hand. Smoke still curled from the barrel. Blood trickled from a wound in his arm.

"We didn't do this as neatly as you did, Jerry," he said. "Five we killed; only nine surrendered."

"And our people?"

"Just this scratch." He touched his wound negligently. "Andrei fought like a demon."

"There's something else, Jerry. Three of the prisoners—and I'll swear not a bullet touched them—are lying in the road spitting up blood. A couple of others look damn sick."

I ran toward the street. "Where's Hank Jenkins?"

"He's already out there."

VIII. The Valley—Saturday afternoon. Dr. Stewart Roswell

BEFORE noon on the second day of the war George Knight and I escaped Los Angeles. Chen Phiang developed an amazing ingenuity.

Originally, the Communist soldier planned to take only Knight and myself out of Los Angeles. But Lin Yeng's family went with us as well. "By tomorrow this will be a city of death. We have no reason to stay," Lin said.

Six of us crowded into the body of the panel truck. It was hot and it became unbearably stuffy.

We remained locked in the back of the truck until we reached the Arrowhead highway at Running Springs. Chen Phiang got out, then, and opened the rear door. "I think there will be no more guard posts," he said. "But perhaps it is not wise to stop here. I do not know your mountains."

"By tomorrow it won't matter," Lin Yeng told him.

"The sickness?" his cousin asked. "Is it truly an American poison or—"

"A poison, yes. But it's something they did to themselves." Lin Yeng described the effect of radiation on the city water supply. The Chinese soldier grimaced. He looked at his uniform, wiping his hands over the rough cloth. Suddenly he ripped off the tunic and flung it away. He kicked off his boots and removed the paratrooper's trousers. He stood naked on the deserted road, a powerful man having the muscular grace of a tiger. With his uniform gone, I seemed to see his face for the first time—the handsome, strongly intelligent face of a boy. His hair was shaved close. His eyes glowed with the hope of youth—the same idealism I had seen in my



*Boris
Yarovich*

classrooms for as long as I had been teaching.

The Orientals did not have our western mores about modesty, and the Chinese family was undisturbed by what Chen Phiang had done.

Knight got out of the truck and hobbled a short distance, exercising his muscles. But I saw that it was very painful to him. His face went white and it was beaded with sweat. I helped him back to the truck. He leaned against the door, breathing hard.

"Stewart," he said, "I told you this catastrophe gives us a magnificent opportunity. We mustn't lose it."

"Not all of us, I'm afraid, are going to see it quite the way you do."

"If I could only persuade people to know the good that is in their own hearts! If I could talk to them—" He put his hand on my arm. "By tomorrow, Stewart, the troops in Los Angeles will be at our mercy. Sick men dying in agony. There are two things our people could do. We could take revenge. We could kill them all. But suppose for the first time in human history we met force and hatred with love!"

"You might pull off your miracle, Knight, if you could speak to every individual in Los Angeles as you have to me."

Chen Phiang appeared wearing jeans and a plaid shirt. Back in the truck Lin Yeng and I rode in front with Chen, to give the others more room. Lin wanted us to drive as far as Big Bear; since it was larger than any other mountain resort, he thought we might have a chance of finding people there.

Once we stopped to round up some refugees. It was three hours before we found them all and helped them back to the truck.

Because we had stopped so long on the road, it was five o'clock in the afternoon—Saturday, the second day of the war—before our panel truck entered the village of Big Bear. A tall, broad-shouldered boy of nineteen—with the penetrating gaze of a man; a frightening kind of maturity—met us in front of the hotel. His name was Jerry Bonhill.

IX. The Valley—Sunday night Jerry Bonhill.

THE water, as cold as a mountain spring, lashed over my body from the shower head. Clean water, good water: we had it in our valley, while the city below the mountain stank with poison and death.

In the adjoining bedroom I heard static from my portable radio, and suddenly the clear, quiet voice of George Knight. It was nearly dusk Sunday night, the third day of the war. For twelve hours the Quaker had been broadcasting from the transmitter in the frame building behind Canster's appliance shop.

Cheryl banged on the bathroom door. "They have it going again, Jerry!"

I grabbed a towel from the rack and went into the bedroom, mopping off the cold water while I listened to the broadcast. The Quaker's patient, reasoned plea came in perfectly. I hoped to God the reception was as clear in Los Angeles.

Cheryl lay on the bed, her head close to the radio. She looked at my nakedness and smiled like a vixen.

Suddenly her lips were on mine, liquid and yielding. I felt the pulsing fire leap in my blood. I saw the sensuous woman triumphant in her eyes.

"You devil," I laughed. "When I want to talk seriously—"

"There's a time for talking, my love, and a time for—"

She gasped as I pulled her down on the bed beside me.

Afterward, Cheryl lay pressed against my side, her eyes closed and a smile on her lips. I relaxed in the peace and the stillness of our love. I became aware again of George Knight's voice coming from the speaker of my portable.

The third day of the war, and we knew that the collapse of civilization was complete. Nothing could hold back the chaos. The stench of death in Los Angeles was a mirror held up to the face of a ruined planet. Few people had died in the original bombings; the cities had been organized to meet that emergency, but no organization could cope with what followed—a network of continental rivers, steeped in radioactive poison and carrying the sickness everywhere.

We had one way we could help—and only one: George Knight's plea to the people of Los Angeles.

Cheryl stirred and opened her eyes. She leaned across my chest to turn down the radio.

"What happens, Jerry, if they don't listen to him?"

"They'll kill a good many of the Russians, and the Russians will retaliate."

"Our world shrinks to the size of a mountain valley."

"Enough—we have each other."

"You and I, Jerry—we're not twenty yet, and the others look to us—" She drew in her breath sharply.

"Why, Jerry? Why you and me? Couldn't someone else—"

"We can't dodge it."

I pulled on my shirt. Cheryl got up and put her arm around my shoulder. "I'm beginning to see you now, Jerry, as Pat did."

I cracked her rear with the palm of my hand.

"A man, Jerry. That's all it takes—but suddenly I realize how much courage it takes to be a human being."

Through the window behind her I saw the windmill lifts of a helicopter whirring against the red sky.

"The Soviets are back," I said to Cheryl, pointing toward the ship. "Run over to the lodge and tell the others to break out the guns. I'm going down to the hospital after Psorkarian. The Cossack might just be able to knock down the 'copter with a submachine gun."

"Be careful, Jerry."

I left the cabin and ran toward the hotel. The ship was moving toward us cautiously; the pilot wasn't taking any unnecessary risks, and he didn't know how well-armed we might be. I assumed they were still after Clapper; no other possibility occurred to me.

On the village street, half a block from the hotel, I saw Boris Yorovich and Janice Gage, walking arm in arm. Naturally, they hadn't seen the Russian ship. They were too immersed in each other. I jerked them back to reality; Yorovich said he would get Psorkarian.

"George Knight's all right?" I asked.

"The transmitter's working fine; Janice and I came up for dinner. We were on our way back—"

"Join him as soon as you can; I don't like to leave him alone."

They ran toward the hotel. I returned to the lodge beside the lake; most of our weapons were there. As I sprinted over the hill, I saw a parachutist descending twenty feet above me. The paratrooper had a submachine gun in his hand.

The man came down close to me. I sprang as his feet touched the

ground. I had no time to reach the lodge and arm myself. The man was a giant, a human machine of flesh and bone driven by the hypnotic opiate of hatred.

Screaming in animal fury, he swung his submachine gun toward me. I kicked upward against the barrel. The hail of bullets spattered the trees above my head. I kicked again and I saw his grip loosen; I jerked the gun from his hands. He lunged at me, swinging his arms like bear claws. I clipped his jaw with my knuckles. Physically the blow rocked him back on his heels, but he seemed unaware of the pain.

He reached for my feet and dragged me down. His clawing hands found my throat. I fought to break the grip, hammering my fists into his jaw. The face was a bleeding pulp before his fingers slid away and I was able to breathe again.

I stood up. A clangling echo sang in my ears. I heard more gunfire, from another direction, and after a moment I located it: the transmitter! The objective of this raid had not been Willie Clapper, but George Knight.

I snatched up the paratrooper's submachine gun, where it had fallen, and I ran toward the village. I came toward the appliance shop from the east. West of the transmitter I saw occasional spurts of gunfire in the shadows.

Two men were leaving the transmission shack. In the pale light inside the building I saw George Knight lying back in his chair. He was dead. They had beaten the gentle Quaker to death with the butts of their weapons. The two men were stringing wires from an explosive charge they had left in the building.

I raised my gun and fired. They

died screaming, as the bullets ripped open their skulls. Four other paratroopers, who had been holding off Yorovich and Psorkarian, sprang up at the sound of the shots. I had no shelter. Bullets from their guns tore the soft earth toward me. I squeezed the trigger of the submachine gun; simultaneously Yorovich and the Cossack moved out of hiding. The four men died in our crossfire.

Blood soaked the sleeve of my left arm. My fingers felt numb, with a kind of remote and impersonal pain. Yorovich and Psorkarian loomed out of the shadows.

We ran along the village street in the darkness. The sky above us was red with the last light of the dying sun.

X. The Valley—Monday afternoon *Jerry Bonhill*

AFTER we buried Knight, we made fifteen graves at another part of the lake shore for the nameless men who had died during the Soviet air attack. There were no survivors.

The Soviet attack made it clear that the broadcasts were having some effect in the city. Otherwise, the Russians would not have traced the transmitter and tried to destroy it. Stewart Roswell warned me not to reach too much into that, however. "General Zergoff has a bitter, personal conflict with Knight. He would send his whole force up here, if he thought he could find Knight."

It was late in the morning before I had an opportunity to examine the helicopter.

I asked Vasili Shostovar to go with me. He had been a mechanic in Moscow and, better than any of us, he would be able to judge what

repairs had to be made. The thin, swarthy man had begun to modify his clothing and he looked less like a slum kid in uniform. He made no more oblique references to party discipline. He had joined us in the ambush of the second Soviet car; that made him one of us, and I accepted it. But there was no feeling of friendship between us, none of the honest affection I felt for the Cossack and Morrenski—yes, even Andrei Trenev, who had attempted to help Willie Clapper escape.

The Russian looked over the motor carefully.

"She's as good as new, Bonhill." His words were vaguely slurred; on his breath I caught the sour odor of liquor.

"What about the fuel?" I asked.

He glanced into the cabin. "Better than half a tank."

"Could we use gasoline from the village service stations?"

"I doubt it. But Psorkarian says there's an airport in the eastern part of the valley; you ought to find some aviation fuel there."

"Do you know how to fly?"

"No. Grenning, the Russian, does."

Karl Grenning was twenty-four, as large as I am and perhaps thirty pounds heavier—all of it hard muscle. He had the blond, Nordic good-looks which the Germans had once built into a maniac's cult of war.

"You want to use the 'copter?" Grenning asked.

"Possibly."

"The Doc says I'll be up and around by tomorrow. Where do you want to go—" He hesitated for a moment before he added, with an ingenuous smile, "—Commander?"

"We've no use for titles. My name is Bonhill."

"Sorry, sir. You'll have to—"

"The 'sir,' too. We're not a military camp."

"It's a habit the Communists taught us. Personally, I've always hated it." When Karl Grenning got the point, he jumped on the bandwagon fast enough. But the tradition was a nasty thing to watch. Grenning was suddenly buddy-buddy with me. "I've got news for you, Bonhill. You may not have picked it up, yet. The Red troop transports won't be coming in any more; maybe they've already stopped."

"Roswell tells me they have landings scheduled for a week. What happened?"

"I picked up the gossip at headquarters. They're keeping this under wraps as long as they can. It's a breakdown in the distribution of supplies to the Siberian bases. Primarily food and fuel."

"How many Communist troops are in Los Angeles now, Grenning?"

"Two hundred thousand. A quarter of a million at most. The whole Red machine has broken down in Europe and Asia. The after-effects of the bombing are worse than anyone expected. The Politburo is finished . . ."

Los Angeles was the only metropolitan area which had a chance of surviving. That was the assumption we had to make. More and more I realized how fundamental Knight's message was. The invading army was all that remained of the enemy, and the city was all of America that had escaped the disaster. Here, flung together, were the two halves of our world, the last fragments of the old civilization. Here they had to find peace; they had to survive. In this city—if they listened to Knight—we could build tomorrow.

If they listened to George Knight. They had to hear the Quaker's message and they had to believe in it. It was the only chance.

XI. *The City—Tuesday, The Fifth day. Jerry Bonhill*

TUESDAY afternoon, the fifth day of the war, I went back to Los Angeles with Stewart Roswell. Grennig piloted our helicopter.

I wore two revolvers belted to my jeans and I carried a rifle. But I made sure Grennig carried no arms.

I offered Roswell a rifle, but he pushed it aside. "I've never shot a gun in my life, Jerry."

"It's time you started learning."

He smiled. "Even to build a society based on love?"

"Idealism with teeth in it." I pushed the weapon in his hands; he took it reluctantly. "A man has to survive before he can build."

Grennig brought the 'copter low over San Bernardino and we saw the first stark evidence of the fighting. The downtown district of the suburb was a burned-out ruin. Residential streets had been bombed indiscriminately, but many of the houses were still standing.

As we moved closer to Los Angeles, the devastation became worse.

The industrial district and the heart of the city were an unrecognizable shambles.

Roswell said, "They were expecting a naval attack when Knight and I left the city."

"That must have been the heavy guns we heard yesterday."

Roswell's face was white; beads of sweat stood on his lips. "It looks as if the navy made a successful landing. The Russians were trapped. They used gas and destroyed everything—to hold the territory they had taken."

Karl Grennig broke in, "Our boys are supposed to have—I mean to say, the Communists are sup-

posed to have very effective chemical weapons. A couple of dozen bombs dropped from the air would wipe out the city."

At Roswell's request we flew north from the harbor and landed on the beach. The homes along the ocean front boulevard were undamaged. Roswell picked up the rifle I had given him.

"Idealism with teeth to it," he muttered. "I'm going to need this after all, Jerry."

He jumped from the cabin, landing on the soft, warm sand. "One man would give the order to destroy the city; and one man would manage to survive, if all the world died. Don't wait for me. I don't think I'll be back."

He strode toward the wooden stairs leading from the beach to the top of the bluff. I called after him, "Where the hell're you going, Roswell?"

He plodded on without answering. I motioned Grennig toward the cabin door. His face paled. "It's suicide, Bonhill! There are still some Soviet troops around up there. We don't stand a chance."

"Then we have to bring Roswell back, don't we?"

When Grennig and I reached the boulevard, Roswell was on the walk in front of a large, pseudo-Spanish mansion. I knew the house. It belonged to Marvin Dragen III.

Soviet soldiers lay dead on the boulevard, their guns still clutched in their hands. These were the die-hards; they had won the city of the dead—and died themselves. None of the men was wearing a mask. Obviously they hadn't known the gas was to be used.

I saw him, then, as the door of the Dragen house swung open. A tall, Soviet General in full dress uniform. The Order of Lenin on

his breast caught and held the glint of the afternoon sun. He was wearing a gas mask that hid his face and deprived him of his only human resemblance.

A god of war gone mad, for the danger from the gas had long since gone. He held a submachine gun in his hand. He aimed it at Stewart Roswell.

"Zergoff," Roswell whispered.

The Russian squeezed the trigger before I had time to fire. The hammer of Zergoff's weapon fell on an empty chamber.

"I held the beachhead," the Russian said proudly, his voice muffled by the mask. "Not even the American navy could throw me out."

"You did this?" Roswell asked. "You killed them all?"

Roswell fumbled with his rifle. But he did not fire. He turned away and walked toward Grennig and me, staggering like a drunken man. Zergoff continued to fire.

"Let him die in his own way," Roswell said, "in his dead city. Pray God give him just one minute of sanity before it's over! Let him smell the stench of death and see the ruins; let him know the thing he's done; let him judge his own inhumanity. That's hell enough for any man."

Roswell gripped my arm. He was gasping for breath and I saw tears in his eyes.

3. The First Two Years

Jerry Bonhill

*I. The Valley—Tuesday evening,
The Fifth Day*

THIS was our physical world—fourteen men and two boys; twelve women and a Mexican child of fourteen. Five of them

were Chinese; two were Negro; two Indians; four Russians, a German and an Italian. Catholics, Jews, Protestants, Hindus, Buddhists. The races of man; the nations of man; the faiths of man.

I told them briefly what we had seen in Los Angeles. I said they were free to go back to the dead city and live with the dead, scavenging food in the ruins.

I saw dismay on their faces, the shadow of the lonely horror. I went on quickly to suggest a general plan of survival.

I said we would begin with an inventory of our resources—the tools, the canned food, the clothing, the gasoline, the hunting guns, the shells which were available in the village. We would move everything into the largest market and use it as a warehouse. Until we worked out a system of replacements, nothing was to be taken out of that warehouse except on my written order. I asked Lin Yeng and his wife to manage the warehouse for us—to classify the supplies and to set up an accounting system for all withdrawals.

From the back of the room Vassili Shostovar spoke up. "High-handed is the word for it. Suppose we don't want to play your game, Bonhill?"

I answered quietly, "You don't have to stay in the valley."

Shostovar snorted. "All this fine talk of yours about your American way of life! Right now you're setting up Communism. Did we vote on any of this? Did we elect you to—"

Psorkarian sprang up, his face angry in the white glare of the lantern. "Then we'll hold an election. We'll put Jerry in office."

I knew the Cossack would get a majority, but that sort of formal

procedure was the last thing I wanted. "These are only emergency measures," I told him. "Anyone of you would suggest exactly the same things."

I set up a communal dining system for all of us in the lodge, because that made it easier to use our food efficiently. I asked seven women to do the kitchen chores—Mom, the Sutong sisters, and three of the women Chen Phiang had picked up on the road. Since the supply of fresh food was our most immediate problem, I suggested that we begin farming operations at once.

Morrenski said, in his plodding way, "I have seen seed packets in the stores here. We can use them for the first planting."

"For our second season, we'll take seeds from this year's crop," Trenev added.

I assigned Chen Phiang, Shostovar, Grennig and Giorgio Leopardi to work with Morrenski and Trenev, and I threw in the three kids as well—Jim Riley, Ted Fisher and Carlota Porra. It would do them good to work in the summer sun, and they needed to feel that they were doing their part.

Our only source of fresh meat would be the game we shot. I appointed Boris Yorovich and Feodor Psorkarian our community hunters. It was logical, then, to give them control of our firearms. In the shadow government I had to make, the two men would be the police power.

We had one more interruption from Shostovar. "You're organizing a nice little dictatorship, Bonhill; I hope the rest of these fools understand that."

"An emergency economy," I repeated patiently.

"Communism, and we may as

well face it. You arbitrarily assign us work. You give us no choice. You—"

"You make the choice if you stay in the valley," I reminded him for a second time. "We've all had our fill of arguments over words, Shostovar. There's one big difference between what we're doing and the police state you came from. Here you aren't afraid to say what you think. You didn't hesitate to call me a dictator a minute ago. You know you can talk as much as you like and nothing's going to happen to you."

The meeting broke up after dark.

"This is the beginning, isn't it?" Cheryl asked me as we crossed the hill.

"We'll survive. If we have faith in ourselves, our world will never die."

Faith: that fundamental human need. I had organized the material resources of the valley, but I had provided nothing to satisfy man's inner soul. I mulled that over as I showered and dressed for dinner.

It was the problem of formal religion, and I was afraid of it—afraid of the potential conflict it involved. Each man has his own god. A sincere faith often comes hand in hand with a fanatic will to convert others. We had such a jumble of orthodoxies in our valley, faith itself might one day smash our new world into dust.

My solution to the problem crystallized around the feeling each of us had for George Knight. I proposed it that night at dinner in the lodge.

The knoll where Knight and Thatcher and the Negro were buried I made our community place of worship—a church without walls and without ritual, a

church for all men open to the face of God.

The idea was a dud at first. The conventions of the dead world passed slowly. Yet, in time, we accepted the knoll as a commonplace part of our lives.

It was a slow-working miracle performed by the gentle persuasion of a Quaker who was dead. It made us see the essential spirit of all our gods.

It was our first real vision of George Knight's new world.

II. Outside the Valley—July, The First Year

IN JULY I made my first expedition away from the valley. By that time our economy was functioning without a hitch. We were farming more than fifty acres of the rich, black soil; the corn was already waist high.

Eight times Chen Phiang and Feodor Psorkarian drove to the city, foraging for equipment and supplies we had not found in the village. By their third trip they had brought back two enormous vans, and enough drums of diesel fuel to keep the trucks running for years.

They pillaged every library which had escaped the fire. Stewart Roswell classified the books and shelved them in the village high school. Eventually we had more than two hundred thousand volumes. Reading became one of our regular leisure activities.

That summer was an idyll for us all. We faced no hardship and no privation; none of us had any really difficult work to do. Four or five hours a day was the longest time anyone worked on the farm. An idyll in the hot, mountain sun.

By the beginning of July ten

couples had moved into cottages along the lake. Yorovich was living with Janice Gage and Psorkarian had taken Lola Donne—or perhaps it was the other way around.

A kind of wedding ceremony gradually developed. At a meal in the lodge, when we were all together, both the man and the woman formally announced their intention to live with each other. They asked me to assign them a cabin of their own.

Chen Phiang married Charlotte Sutong. Charlotte's sister, Betty, was living with the most adaptable of the two Indians, Palra Rubhai.

Giorgio Leopardi married Helen White, a fragile, serious, intelligent girl very much like himself. Conscientious in the ritual of his church, Leopardi went through an intense, inner conflict before he made up his mind. We had no ordained priest to perform the sacrament of marriage and no likelihood of finding any.

Igor Morrenski, plodding, slow-witted, and conscientious, took a wife amazingly different from himself. Emily Marsh, not yet twenty, was by far the most attractive of the five refugees the Yengs had brought in. She was a goddess for him to worship.

Only Karl Grenning and Vasili Shostovar had not taken wives. Except for Mom and Virginia Grant, both in their sixties, and Carlota Porra, not yet fourteen, we had no other unattached women in the valley. Potentially it could become an explosive situation. The least reliable men in our community were excluded from something the rest of us shared.

In order to head off that conflict, I tried to find other refugees to bring to the valley. During July

Grenning taught me to fly the helicopter; he gave the same instruction to Psorkarian, because I was taking the Cossack with me. I needed his quick wit and very possibly his accurate trigger finger. Our shadow government I left to Stewart Roswell and Boris Yorovich.

We flew north first, beyond the Tehachapis. The San Joaquin Valley was a wasteland. Three or more of the big bombs had fallen there—perhaps because Soviet bombers had been shot down over the valley, or the San Joaquin may have been a tactical Soviet target. In either case, the results were the same.

Farther north the devastation was worse. The bombs in the San Francisco area had changed the face of the map. A forty mile chunk of the peninsula had disappeared; the bay was open to the sea. A tiny, smooth-domed island, washed by a heavy sea, marked the point where the city had been. Bombs had ripped open an inland lake farther west in the bed of the Sacramento River.

Two hundred miles north of the state capital we saw our first people, an enormous refugee camp sprawling on the flat, hot plain near Shasta Dam. Shock waves had cracked open the dam and water trickled in scores of tiny streams across the plain. Tents, shacks jerrybuilt from cardboard containers, and automobiles crowded the banks of the streams. We skimmed low over the camp, and we smelled the stench of death. The bodies, huddled by the water, were bloated and black with decay. Buzzards picked at the white skulls; coyotes walked the ruins.

We followed the Sierra range south. On the Feather River we

spotted a small camp, but it was deserted. Two dozen automobiles were parked by stone fire rings. Clothing, cots, and empty food cartons were scattered on the ground, perhaps by foraging bears. Water from a recent rain lay in the open fire beds, indicating that the people had been gone for some days.

At dusk we were over Tahoe. The forests and the resorts on the east shore of the lake had burned in a fire started by the bomb that flattened Reno. The fire had cut a crescent path around Emerald Bay. We saw three cars in the State Park which overlook the bay. Ten people were sprawled grotesquely on the ground. A child was crawling in the dust.

We brought the helicopter down in the clearing. The child screamed when she saw us and tried to run. I caught her. She clawed at my face with her hands and pounded her fists against my chest.

"Take it easy, kid; we want to help you."

"You have guns! You kill people!" She couldn't have been more than four. Her voice still had a trace of a childish lisp. We finally quieted her hysteria by giving her food. She was ravenously hungry; she ate like a starving animal.

While I still held her in my arms, Psorkarian and I crossed the clearing and examined the bodies. The adults had been shot. The appearance of the camp suggested a pitched battle. I asked the girl what had happened.

"They came and they talked to my Daddy and then they began to shoot." With her dirty hands she stuffed more crackers into her mouth.

"Who came, kid?"

"The bad men. They said they would give Daddy money for our

food, and he wouldn't take it."

"Where are the men now, do you know?"

"In the woods." She pointed vaguely. "Do you have anything else to eat?"

"All you can hold. Let's get you cleaned up first."

"The picture's clear enough," the Cossack said. "Some of the survivors die of radiation; the rest fight it out over the scraps of food that are left."

"In less than two months we've become savages."

"Starvation, Jerry, has one law—survival."

A shot echoed from the trees and a bullet sang across the fire ring. The child began to scream again. The Cossack fired his rifle into the darkness. I grabbed the girl and ran toward the helicopter. Bullets slashed the earth close to my feet. I threw the child into the back of the cabin and snatched up the submachine gun, spraying the trees with lead. I heard a shrill cry and a man's voice cursing.

Psorkarian pushed past me into the ship. I fired another round as he started the motor. I leaped into the cabin and the helicopter rose slowly. I saw a mob of men and women crowding into the clearing, firing up at us. I swept them with bullets from the machine gun.

As our ship cleared the pines, Psorkarian said, "They thought we had food—or maybe they wanted the 'copter.' I saw him smile. "And I was just about to suggest that this would be a peaceful place to spend the night. Seems to me, we'll be safer down in the valley with the dead."

Safer with the dead. We didn't have to worry about their integrity or their respect. Only the dead would understand George Knight's

dream. The living? In another generation they would be dancing war chants around a witch doctor's ceremonial campfire.

III. The Valley—Christmas, The First Year

"YOU were right, Jerry," Cheryl said. "It does sound pretty."

I stooped and kissed the back of her neck as I carried another log to the fire. We were in our cabin dressing. From the lodge next door we could hear the piano, and the voices singing carols. It was Christmas Eve, our first winter in the valley. Snow lay four feet deep on the ground. The full moon, riding low above the ridge, transformed our tiny world into a fairyland.

The traditional Christmas was entirely my idea. My shadow government had been against it. Yorovich and the Cossack because they knew nothing about the holiday; Cheryl because it was a Christian festival excluding other faiths.

I knew if I turned the arrangements over to Mom I'd get exactly the thing I had in mind. Mom was a storehouse for superficialities. She gave us an innocuous holiday of genial good fellowship—a holiday for kids.

We had fourteen of them in the valley that Christmas, ranging in age from four to fourteen. After our first exploration north to Tahoe, Psorkarian and I made six more helicopter hops out of the valley before the snows began. Each time we were able to rescue orphaned children and bring them back with us.

The children gave me a kind of hope again. They would keep our new world alive, if we failed.

The Cossack and I traveled as

far away from our valley as Utah and the northern states of Mexico. We had seen so much desolation, so much death, we had become immune to it. People had survived, yes—but fewer than we would have guessed—and sometimes we spotted roving bands on the earth below us. They had become almost literally savage tribes—barbarians, thinly veneered with the skills of civilization and the mores of sophistication.

Twice the Cossack and I tried to talk with small groups. They respected us because we were better armed; but they had no respect for what we had to say.

One group gladly traded us two small children for a case of canned food. Even the mothers shed no tears. They had a new system of values built on expediency, survival, and a reasonably full belly.

Cheryl got up from the dresser, pushing her new shirt—a bright, flannel plaid—into her jeans. Mom had insisted on having gifts to go with her kind of Christmas, and I authorized Lin Yeng to issue new clothes for all of us from the warehouse.

"How do I look?" Cheryl asked.

"The way a wife should." I grinned and ran my hand over the swelling mound of her abdomen.

She kissed me. "Jerry, he's going to be born in a good world."

"Of course, we're making exactly—"

"I know how you've felt since that first trip out, when you brought back little Nancy Watson. You haven't talked about it, but there isn't much you can hide from me."

"It's all right now, Cheryl. I wanted to do too much too fast; I realize that."

"Do you, Jerry? Sometimes I see the sadness and the frustration in your eyes and I—" She looked into my face. "You need the symbolism of Christmas; we all do. Perhaps that's why you insisted upon it the way you did." She kissed me long and ardently and her lips murmured, "Merry Christmas, Jerry."

We crossed the snow to the lodge, using the snow shoes Igor Morrenski had made us out of pine and strips of deer hide. Most of the others were there ahead of us. I had worked late that afternoon in the corral, building a stall roof broken by the weight of snow. Three long tables were set close together in front of the fire. Mom had decorated them with pine cones and fir boughs. She had found some red and green candles in the warehouse. The children sat together at one table, laughing and whispering together and eyeing the packages under the tree.

As much as possible we kept the children together, to build in their minds an instinctive pattern of mutual sharing. Yet a family discipline was necessary, too; each of them had a permanent home in one of the lakeside cottages.

The women brought in the food from the lodge kitchen—three large roasts of deer meat, vegetables canned from our own fields, cranberries withdrawn from the warehouse, hot pumpkin pies with a strange, cracker-like crust made from ground cornmeal and our own butter. Except for salt and sugar and luxury items, we had made ourselves independent of the canned food in the village.

When our Christmas Eve dinner was finished, Mom brought in the punchbowl. I had let her have liquor to make the eggnog, which

she considered fundamental to the holiday.

Mom filled cups for all the adults. She hesitated when she came to me. At home she always made me a special, "stickless" concoction—even after I had started in college, and had gone on the usual freshman-year bender. Finally she filled a cup half full. "You're—you're living with a woman now, Jerry; I guess it's all right."

She never called it marriage.

I noticed that Vasili Shostovar and Karl Grenning came back to the punchbowl three times in rapid succession. I remember thinking that we might have trouble; Mom's eggnogs were never mild. This was the first time the two opportunists had a chance to drink since I put the liquor in the storehouse.

But we were abruptly thrown into the children's world of Christmas, and I forgot about our two misfits. Mom stooped under the tree and began to pass out our presents. Most of the others had followed the pattern Cheryl and I set; nearly everything there was for a child.

While the children played on the floor under the tree, we went back to the punchbowl. "Why, it's empty!" Mom said, giggling a little—one of her eggnogs was certainly more than she could handle. I saw that Grenning and Shostovar were gone. They had finished the eggnog and gone to sleep it off—or so I thought.

"I'll have to make another batch," Mom decided, glancing at me. "Jerry, won't you let us—"

"If it's all right, Jerry," Lin Yeng put in, "I'll run over to the warehouse and get some more liquor."

I signed the withdrawal requisition and handed it to him. While he was gone, we sang carols around the piano. Half a dozen of them. Then Barbara Yeng began to look anxious.

"I don't know why he's taking so long," she said. "I'd better see if he needs any help."

She was back in five minutes, and Lin Yeng was leaning heavily on her arm. His face was bruised and bleeding; his right eye was swollen shut. Barbara helped him into a chair by the fire. While Hank Jenkins cleaned the wounds, the Chinese told us what had happened.

When he opened the door of the storehouse, Grenning and Shostovar had been inside—very drunk. They were maneuvering a case of whiskey through a broken window. Yeng went to stop them—and that was all he remembered until Barbara found him sprawled on the floor.

My immediate reaction was to go after the two men, but I reminded myself that this was a community responsibility—and I waited to see what the others would do. This was our first clear-cut criminal act.

And I wasn't let down. They reached a decision almost as a matter of course, each of them in his own way very much aware of the precedent of justice we were setting up.

Igor Morrenski said slowly, "They have taken material from our warehouse without a requisition—without even offering to do the extra work to earn it. We should make them do the work, and deprive them of what's left of the stolen liquor as a penalty."

"If they refuse—"

"Then they should have none of

the other things they get by living with us. That means food and a place to sleep and our friendship."

"That's exile!" Mom cried.

"If they choose that, yes," Cheryl told her.

"What about my cousin?" Chen Phiang asked. "Do we punish them only for taking property, and not for the harm they have done him?"

"We're trying to make a world for free men," Yorovich added. "Property has a secondary place with us. Shostovar and Grennig have violated everything we believe in."

From his chair Lin Yeng spoke slowly, lisping because of his cut lip. "I think we might use two penalties. I'll miss some time from work because of what they've done. Shostovar and Grennig should make that up in general community labor. Secondly, they should be sent back to school with our kids until the teachers are satisfied that their incorrect attitudes have changed."

"With these two," Roswell reminded us, "that sentence could run forever."

"I was thinking about special classes," Lin Yeng explained. "A reading program, let's say. They might be made to spend a certain period each day with books selected by Stewart Roswell, and Roswell could give them examinations at intervals."

That settled it. Yorovich and Psorkarian were sent to bring the two men in. By that time the community accepted them as our police arm. The decision was made by the whole group acting together, with no prompting from me.

I saw our dream emerge into a still sharper reality. Cheryl was right. Christmas had been a time for the renewal of my faith.

IV. The Valley—March, The First Year

ON AN afternoon in March I rode west out of the village with Boris Yorovich to Cedar Lake, a very small, artificial lake which had once been a motion picture set. Since the village was wired for electricity, Yorovich had spent months trying to work out a scheme to give us power again. He had a general knowledge of electronics and he had done a great deal of technical reading during the winter. The narrow dam that made Cedar Lake had a drop of nearly thirty feet. Yorovich thought he could find material in Canster's appliance shop and build a generator to take advantage of the flow of water.

"I could use three men most of the summer, Jerry," Yorovich said.

"We can spare them. The kids will do a lot of the farm work."

"I may want more part of the time." He pointed down the gully below the dam. "I want to channel three more streams into the lake, Jerry, so we'll have a larger flow of water over the dam; it'll help prevent a freeze-up next winter."

"We should have electricity, Boris, particularly for refrigeration. I think I ought to let you have all the manpower you need."

"It's tough when we can't use Shostovar and Grennig."

"We agreed on the punishment and we'll stick it out."

That policy was the final evolution of the decision we made Christmas Eve. We gave the men their choice: exile or reform. If they chose to stay in our valley, they did so as children. At the time both of them had been hilariously amused; they weren't laughing any longer. As soon as they had done

the extra labor to pay for the stolen liquor and Lin Yeng's lost time, we assigned them to the library and a special class conducted for them alone by Virginia Grant.

"It's working out," Yorovich told me. "At least for Shostovar. He's beginning to take us seriously."

"Roswell agrees with you. In any case, Boris, this is different from our old idea of criminal punishment. We could have locked the two of them up for a couple of months; this way we have a chance of changing the way they think and making them useful adults."

"What about Grennig?"

"He talks a fast line, but it's a sham; he hates us all . . ."

During the past three months I had read shelves of books on government; I had talked endlessly with Debby Zacharias and Stewart Roswell, picking their minds clean of ideas. I concluded that the most workable, the most man-centered government was the form I knew best—the constitutional organization of the United States.

My cigar was out. I tossed it in the fire. I stripped off my clothes and slid down into the envelope of blankets on my cot.

Three hours later I was awakened by a frantic pounding on the door. "Derry! Derry, tame twick!" It was a child's voice, shrill with terror. I leaped out of bed, throwing a log on the dying fire as I crossed toward the door. The boy on the step was Don Harrow, the five-year-old adopted by Igor Morrenski and Emily Marsh. Don threw his arms around my neck. I carried him close to the fire. He was wearing his woolies. Snow had soaked through the cloth and the

child was trembling from the cold.

"Karl Grennig's beating up my Daddy!" Don said through chattering teeth. "An' he hit my Mommy an' made her face bleed . . ."

The Morrenski's cottage door was open. Igor lay on the floor in front of the dying fire. I took his battered face in my hands and he seized my arm convulsively. In a choked whisper he said,

"Go after them, Jerry. He stole my wife."

"After I get you—"

"The hell with me! I'm all right. Grennig has my Emily!"

"Which road did they take?"

"East, to the desert. Grennig has one of the horses."

I ran to the corral. Psorkarian kept some small arms there. Apparently Grennig hadn't known that, for the cabinet was still locked. I opened it with my own key and took out a rifle before I mounted one of the Cossack's horses.

I rode in bleak darkness, hearing nothing but the howl of the wind. The powdery snow tore at my face like a thousand needles of ice. I was constantly bent low over the side of my horse so I could make out the trail in the snow. When I passed the four-thousand-foot marker the snow on the road was slush; a thousand feet lower it became a cold, driving rain. I had no more hoof marks to follow. If Grennig made the desert, he stood a good chance of getting away.

But there was one factor he hadn't calculated: the quixotic behavior of a mountain storm. Suddenly I was out of the rain. Moonlight stabbed down through the broiling, wind-driven clouds. I was able to see the highway ahead.

I pushed my horse faster. The advantage shifted to me. Grennig was carrying a woman; I rode

alone. I cantered another mile before I came to the long slide which the desert bombing had thrown over the road. I saw Grenning then, almost across the slide area.

I fired my rifle high above his head. I heard Emily Marsh scream as Grenning dug spurs into his horse's flank. She had been slumped across the saddle, playing unconscious until she knew someone was behind her.

She pushed herself from his horse, rolling on the asphalt. Grenning reined in his mount and went back after her.

I caught up with them as they fought on the shoulder of the highway. I swung from the saddle and prodded the German back with my rifle. He stood facing me with bared teeth. For the first time since I had known him, his eyes were neither candid nor child-like. The mask was gone and I saw the man: shrewd, savage, calculating—an ape with the cerebral cortex of a human being.

"You can go, Grenning," I said, nodding toward the desert. "You don't have a choice any longer. But Emily's going back with me, where she belongs."

"Always the Gallahad," he sneered.

I smashed his face with my fist. His eyes glazed but he held his grip on consciousness. He seized a rock and tried to hammer it into my skull. I jerked my head aside. The stone ripped a gash in my cheek with an agonizing fire of pain. I doubled my knees and kicked him from me. He groped for the rifle, lying on the road. I threw myself at him. He swung the butt of the rifle in a wide arc. It grazed my shin.

Grenning jerked back the bolt as I struck him with my shoulder. We

both went down and the rifle was between us. The explosion was muffled by our bodies. I saw the look of surprise in his face—and the slow emptiness of death...

V. The City and the Valley— November, The Second Year

BY NOVEMBER—a year and a half after the war began—the population in the valley had grown to two hundred and fifty. I no longer felt any doubt. Some men had understood George Knight. We all would in time.

Yet there was always one question in my mind. Our greatest opportunity had been Los Angeles. Knight's broadcasts had been made primarily to the city. But Los Angeles chose war. Why?

In November we set up our first formal government and we held our first election. I was chosen president by a vote of two hundred and twenty. Thirty of our children, defined as still socially immature, did not vote.

We held our election late in the afternoon, and afterward Cheryl and I walked up to the knoll above the lake. I felt a need to be alone with her, and the others understood that.

Cheryl and I sat together, looking at the lake in silence. The sun was setting and the fall wind was bitter with the first icy touch of winter. Cheryl moved closer to me. She slid her hand beneath my shirt to keep it warm. I felt the gentle touch of her finger tracing the muscle of my chest—her favorite, almost unconscious gesture of affection. I remembered that on this knoll we first found our love for each other; I drew her face toward mine. She lay in my arms with her lips soft and liquid on my cheek.

Far away I heard the sound of sudden gunfire. I pushed Cheryl from me. On the village street someone was screaming.

I sprinted toward the village. Yorovich came out of the lodge and tossed me one of our submachine guns. The street was in chaos. Our citizens were scurrying into the shelter of the empty stores. Bearded strangers on horseback were riding up and down the road, firing rifles into the mob.

Yorovich and I opened up on the horsemen. Four flung up their hands and fell in the street. The others retreated to the eastern end of the village and barricaded themselves in an empty building. Yorovich and I pinned them down long enough for our people to take cover and our men to break out their guns.

"It's men from the city," Yorovich said.

"After food, you think?"

"Obviously. Winter's coming. There isn't much left to pillage anywhere else."

"We could buy them off with the canned goods we don't need. But to hell with that."

"You're right, Jerry. You can't buy peace from the savages. We fight it out right now, or they'll destroy us sooner or later."

When dusk came, we were attacked by a second force which had lain outside the village. The men escaped from the barricaded store and the two groups formed a united front against us. The fighting was continuous until nearly dawn. Our superior weapons eventually forced them to retreat.

We rested after the night's fighting until noon before we set out in pursuit of the invaders. Fifty of us went in our two big diesel vans.

Our war against the barbarians

was short-lived and very one-sided. Although we faced an enemy outnumbering us five to one, we had superior weapons—and Psorkarian, in the helicopter, gave us an air force. By late afternoon we had taken nearly sixty prisoners.

The brigand stronghold had been the undamaged mansions on the ocean boulevard overlooking Los Angeles harbor. We were still rounding up four prisoners on the beach below the bluff, when the helicopter swung low overhead and Psorkarian called out my name.

"Yes, Cossack?" I shouted up to him. "What is it?"

"A ship of some sort, Jerry. Just outside the breakwater."

"Armed?"

"Damned if I know. I never saw anything like this before."

An hour later I understood what he meant. The monstrosity maneuvered through the harbor entrance, past the flattop sunk against the breakwater, and moved toward the beach. It was a box-like raft with a sail. The sail was a crazy patchwork of varicolored cloth hitched together with woven palm fronds. Along each side of the raft a superstructure held hand-carved oars which six men were plying. The thing stopped fifty feet offshore.

From the deck of the raft a man shouted at us, "Who are you?"

"Americans," I answered.

"You survived in the city?"

"No; we're from the hills."

"We're looking for a man. You may have heard of him—Jerry Bonhill."

"Why?"

"He broadcast to the city. He told us how—"

"I'm Bonhill! come ashore."

The raft ground on the beach. The man sprang ashore and shook my hand eagerly. He was emaciat-

ed, gray-bearded, yet still very distinguished looking. His face had been tanned leather-brown by the sun and the wind. He told me his name was Maurice Phelps, of the U. S. Navy.

He described the destruction of Los Angeles. The navy, he said, had entered the harbor without opposition. All day long, before the attack, they had been hearing broadcasts which began, "I am Jerry Bonhill; I am speaking for George Knight." At first they thought it was a trick, but Soviet sailors in the submarines—sick men, barely able to stand—welcomed them as friends.

However, the Soviet commander had a hard-core defense of about three thousand men—out of the quarter million in the city. Russian planes bombed the incoming ships; the navy drove them off. As the Angelinos and their sick captors moved toward the harbor, the Russians bombed the city indiscriminately with explosives and incendiary bombs. The navy attempted to evacuate both civilians and friendly Soviet troops. The first wave of sick men was loaded into Phelps' ship, and he was ordered to take them to Catalina.

Phelps' ship was in the channel, five miles west of the breakwater, when the sound of firing suddenly stopped in the city. On the horizon they could see the flames of the burning city, but Phelps remembered hearing the motor of only one plane soaring over the ruins.

Ten minutes after that Phelps' ship exhausted its last reserve of fuel. He had no choice but to drop anchor. Half an hour later a Russian submarine surfaced close to Phelps' ship. Ten Russian sailors asked to come aboard—emaciated by the radiation sickness; a terrible horror in their eyes. They were the

last men who escaped the city. They had been aboard the submarine when they heard ashore the cry of "Gas!" Instinctively they slammed the hatches and submerged. Through the periscope they saw the people on the landing fall dead. They saw the ships one by one go out of control. They watched the war-god in the gas mask slaughter a city. The last city of man, which Knight's dream had almost saved.

Since the submarine had the almost inexhaustible power of atomic engines, Phelps used it to make repeated trips ferrying his men and the refugees to Catalina Island. Approximately half the men aboard his ship were Communist troops; the other evacuees were Americans who insisted on sticking by the sick enemy they were trying to help. "A remarkable display of courage," Phelps admitted. "But the whole city was like that; the spiritual excitement of a Crusade. All of them talked constantly about Knight."

The sea was running high and on its last trip back to the ship the submarine, manned by an exhausted crew, rammed it. Both vessels began to sink. Phelps and the fifteen seamen still aboard went ashore on a life-raft. The island was a shambles, swept by fire.

"Our first year out there was rugged, Bonhill—pure hell. Half of us died of the sickness and starvation. But through it all we never forgot those broadcasts to the city. It gave us something beyond ourselves to work for. We had the Russians with us; we saw what it meant to teach them the meaning of America—our revolution, in place of the Communist sham."

During the second summer they managed to grow a little food, but the Catalina colony had existed

close to starvation. Fish was their staple diet; but the spirit of George Knight kept them alive.

The refugees had spent a good part of the summer building Phelps' raft. The old life raft, which they had used for fishing, was in no condition to make the passage to the mainland. Before another winter came, they wanted to leave the island. Phelps and his six sailors had come to find a larger ship which would be capable of moving the whole colony. Like the Wawona refugees, they surmised that I might have built a colony like theirs. They were ready to join forces. I told him they would be welcome to the valley, and I explained how much progress we had made toward rebuilding an organized society.

"So it's President Bonhill." He said it with an embarrassing reverence. "The first President of the American world—for the new breed of American. You'll find us everywhere. In Russia and Africa. In Brazil and Ireland. It is our world, Bonhill; we won't lose it again."

Phelps and his six sailors examined the ships in the harbor. They found what they could use. We worked half the night helping them drain fuel from other rusting hulks to fill the tanks of that one vessel. They sailed immediately. Phelps thought he could land his Catalina colony in Los Angeles shortly afterward.

I lay awake a long time looking at the stars, hazy above the coastal mists. I felt an inner peace and satisfaction; the last question mark was gone. George Knight had not failed in Los Angeles. One man had destroyed the city, yet even here Knight's dream had not died.

At seven the next morning, when the thin, wasted survivors of the

Catalina colony came ashore, our trucks were waiting on the road above the beach. It was a three-hour drive up the road to the valley. I sat with the driver in the cab of one of the trucks; the pale, gaunt people crowded in the van behind us were singing as we moved over the highways of the dead city.

When we reached the village the air was crisp and cold. Snow clouds were scattered over the sky. Our citizens welcomed the newcomers soberly, as friends and as brothers. They took them in and fed them.

I walked back to our cabin with Cheryl. The afternoon sun blazed through the windows. Our first winter fire burned on the hearth.

I dropped on the couch beside Cheryl. "The prisoners Yorovich brought in," she said. "I thought if we put them—"

"We have an elected government, Cheryl. The responsibility isn't all ours any longer." I put my arm around her. "It seems to me we were interrupted yesterday—"

"And it isn't right for the President to leave unfinished business. It sets a bad precedent for our children."

Her fingers worked at the buttons of my shirt. I felt her hand caress my chest and move slowly toward the small of my back.

"Never a new world," I murmured in her ear. "A man and a woman together—they found it long ago."

She sighed and then, crooning deep-throatedly, she whispered Solomon's song, the ancient magic of love,

"Behold, thou art fair, my beloved . . . The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir."

And after that she had no more time for words.

THE END

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